The Princess and the Unicorn

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Based on Mark Twain's "The Prince and the Pauper." Twilight is stressed with her new role as a princess and wishes she could go back to being a regular old unicorn. Dawn Cracker, a unicorn living with her indebted father, wishes she had a better life. When the two meet, they discover they look alike and decide to switch places. What chaos will become of this?

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The Princess and the Unicorn

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The Princess

This was an idea given to me by my former roommate. She suggested that for one of my PMVs, I do the Barbie version of *The Prince and the Pauper* with alicorn Twilight and unicorn Twilight. I didn't think it would quite work for a PMV set, but the idea for a fanfic sprung. So here is my MLP version of Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper* .

Disclaimer: I do not own "My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic" or *The Prince and the Pauper* .

The light from Celestia's sun filled the princess' bedroom as a rooster outside called for every pony to rise. The alicorn's purple eyes slowly opened to greet the sunlight. She sat up in bed and stretched her legs and wings. She turned towards her window, walked up to it and looked out at the small town she lived in. The view she had of it now was much higher up than when she had lived in the old oak, but that did not change the serenity of the sight.

"Ah, good morning, Ponyville," she said with a sigh.

She glanced down at the purple dragon snoring in a box at the foot of her bed. She chuckled and decided to let him sleep for a bit. She walked up to her vanity and gasped. The night had not been kind to her hair. Her dark blue mane was a tangled mess, her purple and pink highlights spread all over the place.

She couldn't help but giggle.

"You don't look so good, Twilight," she said as she attempted to smooth out her mane. "Well, we can fix that."

After washing her mane and tail, which was just as messed up, in a quick shower, she blow dried them both and brushed out the knots. Now when she looked in the mirror, she saw a pretty lavender alicorn with purple eyes and a tidy, straight mane. She wasn't as

focused on looks as her friend Rarity, but now that she was a princess, she felt it was important to maintain a good appearance.

She checked the clock and saw that twenty-three minutes had passed.

"Time to wake up Spike."

He was just as she had left him, all snug in his little box, tucked under his blue blanket, snoring into his pillow. She had a sly look in her eye as she used her magic to pull the blanket off his body. The dragon sat up at the sudden chill.

"Gah!"

"Rise and shine, Number One Assistant!" Twilight chimed. "We've got a big day ahead of us! So let's get ourselves some breakfast and write out our checklist for the day!"

The alicorn flew down the stairs, but the dragon just moaned and flopped his head back onto the pillow. He didn't understand how she could be so cheerful every morning, especially after staying up the previous night studying.

"With a name like Twilight," he grumbled, "you'd think she'd be a night owl."

But it didn't matter what time she slept, she was always up bright and early, just so she could make his mornings miserable.

"Spike!" Twilight called from downstairs.

He groaned as he lifted himself up. "Okay, okay, I'm coming!"

She was already down in the kitchen, preparing pancakes for them both.

"Twilight," he sighed, taking his place at the table, "do we have to wake up at sunrise every single morning?"

"There's a lot to do in the day," she replied, keeping her attention on the stove, "and we must not waste a minute of daylight. If I

remember my to-do list correctly, we have a lot of things scheduled for today."

" *You* have a lot of things scheduled for today. Why can't you just let me sleep an extra hour or two?"

"You wouldn't be so sleepy if you hadn't been up all night reading comic books."

"The new issue of *Power Ponies* comes out in two days! I need to catch up!"

She chuckled. "You sound like Rainbow Dash waiting for the next *Daring Do* book; only you only have to wait a month for each book."

"Oh, like *you* never go crazy for books."

"Touché."

When the pancakes were done, Twilight used her magic to flip a stack of five onto each of their plates. Despite all that had changed, it was nice that her mornings with Spike had stayed the same. Not only was she a princess now, but they were living in a new tree (a castle, for that matter).

After Tirek's defeat, the Tree of Harmony had made a crystal castle grow out of the place the old library once stood. While it was much bigger and had many new rooms, including a throne room, it seemed the Tree of Harmony had restored much of their belongings that had been destroyed in Tirek's blast. It was good, because practically everything Twilight and Spike owned had been in that library, including the books. Those had been restored as well and were now in the west wing of the castle, which was open to the public since the town was in need of a new library anyway.

Even though she had gotten used to her new living space, things weren't exactly the same as before Tirek. Now that Twilight held the official title of the Princess of Friendship, she had a more significant role in Equestria, especially in Ponyville. Ponies now came to her for wisdom and guidance, mostly having to do with rifts in friendships. Some came from outside of Ponyville, ponies that could not make

the long journey to Canterlot.

In fact, dealing with the problems of her subjects was the first duty of the day. She would have two one-hour sessions each day for this task: one after breakfast and one in the afternoon. Sometimes the other members of the Friendship Council would help her, but she did not require them to come, since they had duties of their own. That morning, it was just her and Spike, who was sitting beside her on his little throne, holding the checklist they had made for the day.

The first issue presented to them that morning was between a gray mare with black hair wearing a pink bowtie and the local DJ. The two of them were roommates and not getting along very well.

"Every morning," the gray mare complained, "Vinyl practically throws me out of bed with her loud, incessant wubs!"

"They make very effective dishwashers!" the white unicorn in sunglasses argued. "And didn't you say you wanted me to wake you up for work?"

"Most ponies just nudge sleeping ponies gently! Heck, even shaking me vigorously would've sufficed!"

"You think I haven't tried that? You're a hard sleeper! At least I do the dishes for ya!"

"Can't you find a quieter way to wash the dishes like every pony else?!"

They were arguing so rapidly that it took a while before Twilight could get a word in: "Alright. I think I have a solution. Vinyl, keep your…wubs and wash the dishes later in the day when Octavia is out of the house. That way, you can still wash the dishes your way and Octavia won't be bothered. As for waking her up in the morning, get an alarm clock."

The roommates glanced at each other.

"That's actually not a bad idea," Octavia confirmed.

"Sounds cool," Vinyl said with a shrug.

They both bowed towards the alicorn.

"Thank you so much for your wisdom, your highness," said Octavia.

"Thanks a bunch, Princess!" Vinyl grinned.

"No problem," Twilight beamed. "Glad I could help."

As the mares left the throne room, Twilight whispered to Spike, "Still not used to all the bowing and 'your highness' thing."

"They're just showing respect, Twilight," the dragon replied. "It's customary."

She knew that, but it still felt strange, considering she had only been a princess for a short while and was not used to so much praise.

That's why when a group of photographers started taking pictures of her the second she stepped out the door to run some errands, she covered her face with her wings. Not only was it to hide her face, but to shield her eyes from the series of flashes. The amount of paparazzi following her had increased dramatically after Tirek's defeat. They started shooting questions at her.

"Princess Twilight! How did it feel to go single-hoofedly against Tirek?"

"Princess! Did temporarily absorbing the other princesses' magic have permanent effects? Are you more powerful now?"

"Your highness! What did you have for breakfast this morning?"

Twilight had had enough and pulled Spike onto her back before taking to the skies. Many of the reporters shouted complaints while the ones with wings flew after her.

"They're gaining on us!" Spike exclaimed.

He covered his mouth while trying to keep his breakfast down. While Twilight had improved on her aerial coordination, the ride was still bumpy.

"Oh, at this rate, we'll never be able to stay on schedule!" Twilight groaned as she looked back at the reporters in pursuit.

Spike gulped as he stared ahead. "I think we've got bigger problems!"

"What?"

"Look out for that…"

He was cut off as Twilight slammed flat into the side of a…

"…mountain."

The alicorn slid to the ground in pain. The reporters did nothing to help, just continued snapping pictures. She gazed up at them and groaned.

"I hate flying."

After lunch was the weekly meeting of the Council of Friendship. Seeing Rarity, Applejack, Rainbow Dash, Fluttershy and Pinkie Pie was enough to brighten Twilight's day. That meeting, they were discussing the Crystal Fair, which Princess Cadence had invited them to help prepare. They were to leave in two days and were making sure they had all the materials they needed.

"I've prepared the cloth for the tents," Rarity declared, "not only is it flexible and soft, but it's waterproof and will look fabulous!"

"I've been brushing up on my jousting skills for the tournament," Rainbow said.

Fluttershy stiffened. "Oh, please tell me you've found another partner?"

"Don't worry. I've asked Derpy and she's excited to come."

"Oh, that's good. I'm bringing some of my animals for the petting zoo. Well, the ones who won't mind being petted by a bunch of

strangers."

"I'll have a whole lot of apple baked goods ready for my stall," Applejack guaranteed.

"And I've been practicing my flugelhorn all month!" Pinkie Pie piped.

She demonstrated by blowing fiercely into her crystal horn, forcing everyone to cover their ears.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Also, I placed an order for a cartload of fireworks for the evening show! They will be hoof-delivered to the Crystal Empire by Mr. Cracker himself!"

Twilight blinked. "Who's Mr. Cracker?"

"He's the pyrotechnician who's been making all my fireworks ever since I was old enough to handle them! He lives in a small shop in Hoofington with his daughter. I've never met her, but I hear she's our age and she might come to the Crystal Empire with her dad and I'm so excited because that means we can make a new friend…"

"I think we get the picture," Rainbow said, rolling her eyes.

"Looks like we'll have everything we need," Twilight grinned.

"I think we could all use a break," Rarity sighed. "What say we all go out to dinner tonight?"

"Oh, that sounds lovely," Fluttershy smiled.

"I'm up for that," said Applejack.

"Cool," Rainbow nodded.

"It'll be fun!" Pinkie squealed.

"Yeah, that does sound…" Twilight started to say.

"Uh, Twilight?" Spike said, tapping her shoulder.

He held up their schedule and what he pointed to made the alicorn frown.

"Oh. I'm sorry, girls, but I'm going to have to pass. The mayor's dinner party is this evening and I'm supposed to attend."

"Oh," the five ponies said sadly.

"We understand, Twilight," Rarity assured her.

"Yeah," Applejack nodded. "Yerr responsibilities come first."

Twilight's ears fell back guiltily. Other than these meetings, she never seemed to have much time for her friends anymore. Last week, she had missed Rarity's birthday party because she had to go to a Royal Summit in Canterlot. Three days ago she had to bail on a picnic they had planned because she had to cut the ribbon at the opening of the new hospital wing. Then there were the issues presented to her by her subjects.

And the ones that followed that meeting did not make her feel any better:

"My brother won't pay the rent!"

"My tomato plants were eaten by aphids!"

"She keeps stealing my dolly!"

"My house is infested with rats!"

"She forgot our anniversary!" shouted a yellow mare with pink and blue hair.

The green unicorn mare she was pointing at scowled. "I'm sorry, okay, Bon-Bon?! It's hard to remember when we have so many anniversaries as it is!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean there's the anniversary of our first date, the anniversary of our first kiss, the anniversary of when we moved in together… You know, it would be a lot easier to count if I had fingers!"

"You and your obsession with hands!"

Twilight put her hoof to her head. *Great, now I've become a marriage counselor.*

"Enough!" she commanded. "Bon-Bon, you must forgive Lyra. Just because she's forgetful doesn't mean she doesn't love you. Lyra, to make up for the fact you forgot your anniversary, take Bon-Bon out to dinner."

The two mares looked at each other.

"Dinner!" the unicorn exclaimed. "Why hadn't I thought of that?!"

"I'm sorry I got so angry at you," Bon-Bon smiled.

"And I'm sorry I forgot our anniversary. I'll try not to do it again!"

"It's okay. I forgive you."

After embracing each other, they turned to the alicorn and bowed.

"Thank you, your highness!" Bon-Bon said graciously.

"It's Twilight," the princess grumbled.

"Thank you, Princess Twilight!" Lyra exclaimed.

The alicorn heaved a sigh. "You're welcome."

The couple was still bowing as they backed out the door. Twilight turned to Spike.

"Tell me they were the last ones today," she grumbled.

"That was it," he replied.

She groaned as she put her face in her hooves.

"What's wrong, Twilight?"

"I don't know how much more of this I can take," she confessed. "Every pony comes to me with their problems, no matter how ridiculous; I can't leave the castle without getting mobbed and I have so many duties now, I rarely have time to just hang with my friends

and be normal."

"You're a princess now, Twilight. No one said the job was going to be easy. And you'll have plenty of time to spend with your friends once we're finished setting up the Crystal Fair."

She sighed. "I guess, but sometimes I just wish things could go back to the way they were before I became a princess, when I was just a regular old unicorn."

"You know, the dinner party's not for a couple of hours. We could maybe make a quick visit to Rarity's or Fluttershy's or one of the others'."

"No. I feel like what I need now is to lie down for a bit and read a book."

Spike nodded, understanding that a good book always made Twilight feel better. After the long day they had had, she deserved a break.

Twilight scanned the library shelves for a book that might calm her nerves. While searching in the classics section, her eyes fell upon a small red book titled *The Prince and the Pauper* .

"Huh," she said, levitating the book with her magic. "I haven't read this one in ages."

She spent the next few hours curled up in the corner with the book open in front of her. As she read the story, she couldn't help but chuckle at the absurdity of it. The probability of two ponies of completely different families being the same in appearance was practically impossible, unless they were twins separated at birth. She also couldn't help but wonder why the pauper, Tom Canter, would want to take on the responsibilities of royalty. Terrible as his life was, at least he didn't have to deal with so much stress.

She felt Prince Edward Trotter had the right idea taking a day to be like every pony else. As she read the part where the lookalikes decided to switch places, Twilight shook her head with a sigh.

"If only it were that easy."

She glanced out the window and saw that night had fallen and the stars were out. Soon it would be time for her to go to the dinner party. As she gazed at the beautiful night sky, she thought about what her life had been like when she was still a unicorn. While there had been busy days, they were more laidback compared to the chaos she had now. She didn't have to deal with annoying reporters or crazed fans or whining subjects. She had quality time with her friends, even more time to read, and had the pleasant fortune of being just a run-of-the-mill unicorn.

As she thought this, a shooting star passed over. Now, Twilight was not superstitious, but it never hurt to make a wish. She closed her eyes and whispered:

"I wish that for just one day, I could be a regular old unicorn again."

Of course, since Season 4 just ended and we haven't seen much of Twilight's castle, I had to use my imagination. I also thought it heartbreaking that Twilight and Spike had lost all their stuff when the library was destroyed and had the Tree of Harmony bring that all back too. Why not?

Just to clarify, despite what I used to think of slash pairings, I like LyraxBon-Bon. But I don't like OctaviaxVinyl (those two I just see as roommates). Shrug, that's just how it is.

The Unicorn

Now we meet "the pauper."

That very same morning, in a small run-down house in Hoofington, another lavender pony lay in bed. This mare, however, was not up at sunrise, but asleep on her stomach, drooling onto her pillow. An hour later, she was still asleep, until a red unicorn stallion with a red beard and sticks of dynamite for a cutie mark walked in and shouted:

"Rise and shine, Princess!"

The mare's only response was a groan. The old stallion shook his head with a smile.

"Come on, sweetheart," he said, nudging her gently. "You'll be late for work if you don't get up!"

She groaned again, but this time put her pillow over her head. The stallion sighed, as he had hoped it wouldn't resort to this. His horn glowed with a yellow aura and sparks emitted from it, creating a loud, crackling sound.

"Gah!" the mare screamed as she fell out of bed.

She scrambled to rise so she could glare at the older pony.

"Okay, okay! I'm up! Geez, Dad! You didn't have to destroy my ears!"

Her father smirked. "You left me with no choice. Now get yourself cleaned up and get some breakfast." He chuckled as he walked away. "I really misnamed you, didn't I? I should've called you Night Owl."

The lavender pony rolled her eyes as she groggily walked over to

her vanity. It wasn't a vanity, really, just a small wooden table with a dusty old mirror hanging over it. She gazed at her reflection and grumbled. There were bags under her purple eyes, her dark blue mane was so messy she could barely see her horn, and her short tail was twisted in a knot.

"You don't look so good, Dawn," she groaned, but this was no surprise to her.

She trotted to the bathroom, which gave the term "water closet" a whole new meaning. It was practically the size of a closet. The toilet was covered in grime and the shower was this lone faucet hanging over a drain. She turned the knob, but nothing came out.

"Dad!" she called. "Did you forget to pay the water bill again?"

His silence told her he had. She sighed, but she was prepared for this. Next to the sink was a bucket of water with a washcloth. She dipped the cloth in and threw it over her face. It wasn't a thorough cleaning, but it at least washed the sand out of her eyes.

She returned to her room and levitated her brush from beneath the mirror. She ran it through her mane and cried out in pain as it found a knot. The more she tugged, the more it hurt, so she eventually gave up on her mane and started on her tail. She managed to smooth the surface a bit, but couldn't get the tangles out of there either.

"Oh, forget it," she grunted.

She looked back in the mirror, licked her hooves and attempted to smooth out her hair again. When she was done, her bangs were straightened, but the wisps of her short mane were sticking out from behind her neck and curling in different directions.

"Well," she sighed, "I'm no Princess Celestia, but I at least look somewhat presentable."

She trudged into the kitchen, opened the cupboards and found nothing but a box of cereal and spider webs. She levitated the box of cereal without even acknowledging the spiders. Then she found a

bowl and set it down on the table. She took her seat as she shook the cereal into the bowl. She shrieked when a spider fell out. At this point, her father had walked in and chuckled.

"Talk about a special surprise inside."

Dawn smirked. "Very funny."

She used her magic to lift the spider out of her bowl and out the window. She then levitated her spoon and started eating. The cereal was a bit stale, but it would at least keep her strength up.

"Why don't you have milk with it?" her father asked.

"Don't you remember? We ran out yesterday."

"Oh. That's right."

Dawn watched as her father started going through the mail. Each one he opened seemed to increase the frown on his face. She recognized the postscripts and knew they were bills.

Her father, Fire Cracker, was a pyrotechnician and specialized in explosives, though he mostly made fireworks and could even create small explosions with his horn. He was quite good, but unfortunately, pyrotechnics wasn't a good business to have in a small town like Hoofington. They didn't have much need for fireworks, as they didn't have many big parties, other than the Summer Sun Celebration and New Year's. The materials for fireworks, depending on the type, would also tend to be expensive. He also wasn't well-known throughout Equestria and had few customers. It was no surprise that they should have financial troubles.

Dawn Cracker was also a pyrotechnician, or was her father's apprentice, at least. She could make sparks appear from her horn and put them in the sky when she wanted to. Her cutie mark was a red and yellow firework. She loved her father and helped him out whenever she could. However, he could get a bit forgetful, especially where money was concerned.

When the fifth bill fell on the table, Dawn looked up at her father sincerely.

"Dad, we really need to do something about this."

Fire Cracker sighed. "I know, but I can't just make money appear out of thin air."

"What about that Great and Terrible Trixie or whatever she calls herself? Has she paid for the fireworks and smoke bombs we sent her yet?"

"No, but she said she'd pay her tab when she could."

Dawn rolled her eyes. "Dad, you have to be more assertive with the customers. She's been saying that for months now! We can't just keep making stuff for her for free! We need that money!"

"I know we do, but she's out of town at the moment. I'll talk to her when she gets back."

She shook her head. Her father was a good stallion, but he could be really naïve sometimes. She gasped when she caught sight of the clock. She instantly jumped out of her chair, toppling it over in the process.

"Oh gosh, I'm gonna be late for work!"

"I told you," her father muttered.

Fire Cracker jumped when he opened a pink envelope and confetti spurred in his face. He grinned, knowing who this was from. As he read the contents of the letter, his eyes widened.

"Dawnie, you won't believe what…"

But his daughter had already grabbed her saddlebag and apron and rushed out the door.

Dawn worked part-time at the local Hayburger as a waitress from nine to two p.m. every day except Sunday. She did it to earn extra cash for herself and her father, but she hated the job. It was the busiest restaurant in Hoofington, which meant she was always

bustling about with a notebook and a pile of dishes.

The bell above the door rang as she burst into the diner.

"Miss Cracker!" her boss, the manager, called from the kitchen. "You're late!"

"Sorry, Mr. Burger!" Dawn declared as she rushed to the window to the kitchen where the large blue earth pony in a tie was waiting. "I was…"

"I don't wanna here any excuses! Just don't let it happen again! And get to work! It's the breakfast rush and in your absence, Daphne Feathers over there has been running your tables!"

Dawn's ears drooped in guilt as she glanced at the orange, brunette pegasus in the blue beret flying frantically between tables. The unicorn took her notebook out of her bag before tossing it aside.

"I'm here, Daphne, I've got it!"

The pegasus looked over at her with her green eyes and sighed in relief. "About time. This place is packed!"

"I'm so sorry, Daph!"

The waitress smiled. "Don't be. Just try not to sleep in again."

Dawn returned her smile. Daphne was the only real friend she had in this town and could always count on her to get her out of a jam. The pegasus leaned forward and whispered:

"But I'm not covering your tables now that you're here."

"Oh," Dawn said, snapping back to the situation. "Right. Thanks!"

And so began a long day of rushing between tables, writing down orders and carrying towers of plates. You see, Dawn was a bit of a klutz, which was not a good thing to be when your jobs are handling explosives and carrying dishes. She could usually carry things just fine, but when lifting heavy objects, she had to have complete concentration on her magic, or else she would drop everything.

Fortunately, that rarely happened when carrying explosives, since that was associated with her talent. Carrying dishes, however, was another story.

When lunchtime came, a family of ten came in: a mother and father, seven foals and a grandfather. They sat down at Table Six and Dawn gulped, for that was her table. Her pencil burned on her notepad as she wrote out their orders and kept crossing out whenever the kids or Grandpa changed their minds. It took about five whole minutes to get everything down.

Then the time came for her to carry all the meals over to them. She thought about asking Daphne for help but felt the pegasus had done enough for her today. Dawn took a deep breath.

"Okay, you can do this."

She closed her eyes and her horn glowed pink. Her aura engulfed the plates and lifted them into the air. She opened her eyes and sighed in relief.

"So far, so good."

She started walking slowly towards the table, which was, unfortunately, on the other side of the diner. She kept her eyes glued to the floating plates of food.

"Stay calm, don't drop them. Stay calm, don't drop them," she said to herself over and over.

As she neared the table, one of the foals dropped his dinosaur toy. Dawn was paying so much attention to the plates that she didn't see it when she stepped on it. She cried out as she slipped and fell on her back. Her concentration was broken and the plates fell to the floor, shattering and staining the carpet with food. One of the plates landed on the grandfather's head. He was so shocked that he fainted into the mother's hooves. She scowled at the unicorn.

"You clumsy fool! Look what you've done to my dad!"

"MISS CRACKER!"

Dawn knew the booming voice all too well. "Oh no."

She sat up and met the burning eyes of her boss.

"Clean this up at once!" he ordered. "And replacing these plates is coming out of your pay!"

She hung her head. "Figures."

As Mr. Burger stomped away, Daphne came over to help her friend up.

"You okay?"

Dawn grunted. "I hate my life."

The unicorn walked into her home with downcast eyes. She found her father in the workroom, rolling a dowel in brown paper. He grinned when he noticed his daughter.

"Hey, Princess. How was your day?"

"Not so good," she grumbled.

He shook his head. "You really shouldn't be working so hard, sweetie. A girl like you should be out having fun, making friends," he winked, "meeting stallions."

Dawn couldn't help but smile a little. "That sounds dandy and all, Dad, but we need the money and I just don't have time for that kind of stuff. Besides, I doubt any stallions would be interested in me."

"Don't be ridiculous. You're the prettiest girl in all of Hoofington."

She smirked. "Not in Equestria?"

"No, that was your mother."

She laughed and then looked down at the tube he was making. "What you working on here? A new order?"

"Oh, yes! You left before I could tell you! You remember that Pinkie Pie?"

Dawn rolled her eyes. Of course she remembered Pinkie Pie. Even though she had never met her, she was their best customer, ordering a new batch of fireworks for the parties she hosted every week. If it hadn't been for her, they would've been bankrupt by now.

"Well," her father continued, "she just placed an order for fifty crates of fireworks."

Dawn gasped. "Fifty? Wow. What's she planning this time?"

"They're for the fair in the Crystal Empire." His smile grew wider. "And she wants them hoof-delivered, and since I can't handle this many crates by myself…"

His daughter blinked. "Wait, are you saying…?"

"We're going to the Crystal Empire, Princess!"

She was silent for a long period of time and then let out a girlish squeal. They rarely had the chance to travel, and Fire Cracker usually went alone on deliveries so Dawn could hold down the fort. Ever since news spread about the Crystal Empire returning after a thousand years, Dawn had dreamed of going there. She imagined seeing the sparkling crystal ponies, the glorious crystal palace and the Crystal Princess, Cadence. Royals hardly ever visited Hoofington, so she hadn't seen any of the princesses, aside from Princess Celestia, but that was when she was eight.

Dawn's excitement was short-lived when another thought occurred to her. "How are we going to get there? The Crystal Empire is up north and we can't take the cart through all that snow."

"That's the best part," Fire Cracker replied. "We're going by train."

"Dad, do you have any idea how much two tickets to the crystal empire costs? Plus the freight train for the fireworks?

"Pinkie Pie thought about that and was more than generous."

His horn glowed and two train tickets hovered in the air. Dawn gasped and took them in her hooves.

"Are these real?"

"Yes. And you know what else is real?"

A check floated into her hooves. Her eyes widened when she read the amount.

"One thousand bits?"

"Pinkie paid us that in advance," Fire Cracker explained. "She'll give us another one after the fair."

Dawn tugged hard on her mane to make sure she wasn't dreaming. Not only would that money cover the costs for the delivery, but more than half of their debts! If that Pinkie Pie were there in person, she would hug her!

"This is…" Dawn tried to find the right words, "wonderful! When is the delivery due?"

"She wants us there in two days."

She stiffened. "Two days?! Dad, we'll have to work all night for that!"

"Then what are we doing standing around here talking for? Let's get to work!"

It was around six p.m. when the Crackers decided to break for dinner. Dawn liked to eat in her room. Tonight, her dinner was two pieces of stale bread with a daisy she had picked from outside stuck between them. She chewed her sandwich slowly as she glanced around her room.

Dawn was not the neatest of ponies. The trash can was overflowing, surrounded by crumpled pieces of paper. The few bits of clothing she had were scattered around the floor and over the foot of her bed. The sheets of her bed were tangled together. She hadn't made

it or washed the sheets in months. It wasn't that she was sloppy. She just didn't have the time to pick everything up.

When she was done with her sandwich, she still had twenty minutes before her dad would call her back to the workroom. She glanced at the bookshelf on the wall. She didn't usually have time to read, but when she did, she found it very calming. She also didn't own that many books. She used to have a huge collection of comics, but had sold most of them to help her father pay the bills. All that was left was an old, tattered issue of *Power Ponies* , a battered up thesaurus with a dictionary to match, a cookbook which she almost never used because she was a lousy cook, and one novel, *The Prince and the Pauper* .

Before her mother had died of pneumonia when she was six, she would read Dawn that story every night. It was her favorite, and Dawn had kept that book in memory of her mother. She levitated the book from the shelf and opened to the page she had marked.

The unicorn felt she could relate to the pauper, Tom Canter. She didn't blame him for wanting to be a prince. Anything would've been an improvement from the life he had. At least Dawn's father wasn't as bad as Tom's and she wasn't begging on the streets. Still, her life pretty much sucked just as much. And, like Tom, if she had the opportunity to be a princess, she would take it.

She scoffed at the thought. "Me, a princess."

Dawn straightened up and stuck up her nose. "Servant, could you please put my book away so I don't have to do it myself?"

She laughed, but couldn't help but daydream. After all, every girl dreams of being a princess at some point in their life. What would it be like to live in a castle? It would certainly be better than this run-down old shed they called a house. Servants and cooks would come at her beck and call. She would have more food than she could ever eat, more money than she could ever spend and a whole walk-in closet of beautiful dresses. She would never have to work again and pay off her father's debts.

She also imagined meeting a handsome prince who would sweep

her off her hooves.

But alas, it was only a dream. After all, you had to be an alicorn to be a princess.

Dawn then thought of Equestria's newest princess, Twilight Sparkle. She used to be a regular old unicorn like her, until Princess Celestia gave her wings. Dawn had never seen Princess Twilight but figured she was the luckiest pony in the world to go from being a unicorn to a princess just like that.

That could never happen to Dawn. Twilight Sparkle had earned her wings by saving Equestria countless times. Dawn was nothing special, just a normal unicorn struggling to help her dad with his financial problems. She couldn't even levitate a dozen plates, let alone save the world. She envied Twilight Sparkle and Tom Canter for becoming a prince even for a day.

The only thing she didn't understand about the story was why Prince Edward Trotter would give up his crown like that. Did he really think being poor was better than being a prince? Dawn knew the answer to that.

She glanced out the window at the evening sky. As she did, a shooting star went by. Dawn glanced down at her book and shrugged.

"Why not?"

She clutched the book to her chest, closed her eyes and whispered her wish:

"I wish I had a life like Princess Twilight Sparkle's."

Little did she know that far away, that very princess had wished on the same star.

What? No! I didn't put myself in this story! *looks around with shifty eyes* Okay, okay, I did. Well, I put my avatar in there anyway (DF). My alternate first name Daphne was invented by

Summer Piratepony who's writing a fanfic about me. I came up with the last name to fit in with my username initials.

I wanted the pauper character to not really be Twilight's polar opposite, but have some differences in her character (e.g. morning person vs. night owl). I kind of like how Dawn turned out in this chapter and I hope she stays that way.

Honestly, I don't know much about fireworks and that's why I didn't go into detail about the manufacturing of them.

The Crystal Empire

Sheesh, transition chapters are boring, but necessary.

The first thing Twilight did when she stepped off the train was inhale that warm, sweet air of the Crystal Empire.

"I'm so excited!" Pinkie Pie piped as she bounced onto the platform. "I mean last year's Crystal Fair was fun and all, but this one's going to be even better now that we don't have an evil shadow pony trying to destroy us all."

"Couldn't agree with ya more, Pinkie," Applejack chuckled.

Three fillies squealed as they rushed onto the platform.

"The Crystal Empire!" Sweetie Belle squeaked.

"No matter how many times we come here, it's still awesome!" Scootaloo declared.

"I can't wait until the fair!" Applebloom exclaimed.

"I wonder where Cadence is," Twilight said as she scoured the train station. "She said she'd be here to greet us."

"She's probably just running a little late," Rarity assured her. "You know how busy princesses are."

The alicorn's ears drooped. "I sure do."

Spike grunted as he shoved a pile of luggage off the train. Once it was on the platform, he paused to take a breath.

"Did we…" he panted, "have to…bring…so much…stuff?"

"We need those things for the Crystal Fair," Twilight reminded him.

A filly a few feet away from them gasped. "Mommy, look! It's Princess Twilight!"

That was enough to get every pony's heads turning. In a few seconds, Twilight and her friends were surrounded by fans: half of them wanting to see the princess, half of them wanting to see Spike, as he was the local hero.

"Oh my," Twilight said as many foals held up pictures of her. "You all want my autograph? Well, I suppose I could…"

She levitated a quill out of her saddlebag and hastily gave out signatures. Spike, who usually welcomed this much attention, was also trying to keep up with the number of ponies who wanted his autograph or picture.

Meanwhile, at the far end of the platform, Dawn Cracker was peering behind the train's caboose and gawking at the glorious crystal palace.

"Princess!" Fire Cracker called as he and the conductor lifted crates labeled "Danger: High Explosives" out of the freight car. "A little help here?"

"Huh?" Dawn blinked. "Oh! Sorry, Dad! It's just…this place is so… so…whoa!"

"Yup," her father grunted as he levitated one crate on top of another. "It'll look even more amazing once the sky is lit up with our fireworks." He paused to wipe the sweat off his brow. "But that won't happen if we stand around here daydreaming!"

"Oh, right."

Dawn's horn glowed as she began assisting her father.

"So where are we taking these?" she asked.

"Pinkie said we're to deliver them to the palace," he replied. "Maybe you'll get to see the princess after all."

As Fire Cracker levitated the next box, he winced in pain and put his

hoof to his head.

"You okay, Dad?" Dawn asked in concern.

"Yeah," he groaned. "I'm just not as young as I used to be."

His daughter frowned. Lately, he'd been getting terrible migraines, especially when he used magic, which was why he needed Dawn around. It worried her, because they seemed to be getting more frequent than usual, but Fire Cracker kept shrugging it off.

She looked away from her father a moment to see ponies flocking to the other end of the platform. The crowd was so big that she couldn't see what was catching every pony's attention.

"Wonder what's going on over there," Dawn said.

Her father shrugged. "Probably just some celebrity. This is a pretty big event."

Neither of them realized just how big of a celebrity this pony was. Princess Twilight, her quill now burning with the number of autographs she had given, was searching for an opening in the crowd.

"Oh," she whined. "At this rate, we'll never get to the Crystal Palace!"

A familiar voice was her savior: "Alright, break it up, every pony! Break it up! Give the princess some space!"

Twilight turned to her right and her pupils dilated at the sight of the guard who had pushed through the crowd. This wasn't just any guard, but a certain orange pegasus with deep blue eyes, eyes that locked with hers. A warm, charming smile spread across his face.

"It is a pleasure to see you once again, your highness," the stallion said with a bow. "I trust you had a safe journey."

The alicorn said nothing for a while, only blushed. Her friends all exchanged knowing glances.

"F-f-f-flash!" she stammered, her wings popping up.

Flash Sentry looked up at her in surprise. "You know my name?"

Twilight's cheeks flushed redder. She knew more than just his name. She had met another version of him in an alternate world several months ago, one she had gotten close to. When returning, she had been shocked to find him in this universe too.

That's when she remembered that this Flash didn't know her as intimately as the human one, which would explain why he was speaking to her so formally. Spike had to nudge her side to snap her out of her thoughts.

"Oh," she uttered. "Y-yes, Sir Flash Sentry. Might I ask why you're here?"

"Princess Cadence requested that I escort you to the palace," the guard replied.

The alicorn blinked. "She did?"

She should've guessed her sister-in-law had something to do with this. Cadence had known of Twilight's crush on Flash ever since she had bumped into him after returning from the alternate world. It was hard to hide anything of this matter from the Princess of Love. She must've grown tired of letting nature take its course and decided to give the potential couple a push.

Well, at least she's not putting a love spell on us or anything, Twilight thought.

"Very well," the alicorn said, regaining her composure. "Lead on, sir."

The Crystal Empire was the most beautiful place in Equestria, with crystal walkways, crystal buildings, crystal ponies, crystal everything. The empire was shimmering and full of life. Twilight, however, took no notice of this. She was too busy glancing at the guard walking beside her.

In the few times she had encountered this stallion, they had barely exchanged more than two sentences with each other. She felt guilty, but also afraid. Was he anything like the Flash Sentry she had met in the other world? Or was he different? Sure, he was friendly, but did he see her as anything other than a princess he was meant to protect?

She would admit this to herself: this version of Flash certainly was more attractive.

Her train of thought was interrupted when Rarity nudged her side.

"Say something to him!" the unicorn whispered harshly.

Twilight looked back at Flash to see if he had heard her. Luckily, he hadn't.

Her friend was right though. She had to break the ice at some point, and she would never get to know the Flash Sentry in this world if she didn't try.

"So…Flash," Twilight stammered. "How…how long have you been in Cadence's service?"

He turned his head and smiled. *Okay, good start* .

"Oh, just a few days before we met," he stated but then blushed. "I mean…before your last Royal Summit here, your highness."

She couldn't help but notice that blush. Had he been thinking about how they had bumped into each other upon her arrival in the Crystal Empire?

"What made you decide to become a member of the Royal Guard?" she asked.

"My grandpa, Watch Sentry, was in the Royal Guard and he was always telling me stories. I guess he inspired me."

Twilight gasped and stopped in her tracks. "Watch Sentry? As in *the* Watch Sentry? As in the Watch Sentry who single-hoofedly stopped a rogue dragon from attacking Princess Celestia?"

Flash stopped too and blushed again. "Well, yeah. You've heard of him?"

"Heard of him? He's a legend! My brother was always talking about him! He was his idol! And you're his grandson?"

He smiled shyly away and dug his hoof in the ground. "Yeah, kinda… Anyways, I hope to be as brave and noble as he was someday."

"I'm sure you will."

This time, he looked her directly in the eye and they locked gaze for a long while.

"Ahem," Rainbow Dash said, crossing her hooves. "I hate to break up the love fest, but shouldn't we get going?"

"Oh, right!"

Flash and Twilight turned to each other again, realizing they had said that at the same time. They glanced away with equal shades of red on their faces. Twilight's friends couldn't help but chuckle, except for Rainbow, who was about to gag from all the mush.

In the throne room of the Crystal Palace, they were met with two rows of trumpeters. At the sight of Twilight, Cadence and Shining Armor leapt off their thrones.

"Twilie!" the latter cried, embracing his sister. "Glad you could make it."

"I'm glad to see you too, B.B.B.F.F.," Twilight grinned before turning to her sister-in-law. "Cadence!"

The two alicorns stood a foot away from each other and did their usual greeting: "Sunshine, sunshine, lady bugs awake! Clap your hooves and do a little shake!"

At the shake, Twilight looked up and noticed that Flash was watching and blushed in embarrassment.

"Err, yeah," she said, straightening up. "Thanks for inviting us here."

"Well, the Crystal Fair wouldn't be the same without all of you here," Cadence declared. "After all, you did help with the last one. I hope you don't mind helping with this one too. It's just that with so many ponies coming from outside of the empire this time, this one's going to be bigger than the last. We need all the help we can get."

"It's no problem, Princess," Applejack said, stepping forth. "We're happy to help."

"Ooh," Scootaloo said. "For the fair, do you think we could have a roller coaster?"

"And a Ferris wheel?" Sweetie Belle piped.

"How 'bout a merry-go-round?" Applebloom squealed.

Cadence laughed. "I think before we do any planning, you should all get settled in your rooms first. I gave you all the same rooms as last time. Oh, and Flash Sentry will show the little ones to their room."

Twilight glared at her sister-in-law and whispered, "I know what you're trying to do."

The pink alicorn looked up innocently. "I have no idea what you're talking about."

As the other ponies followed Flash out of the room, Pinkie bounced up to the Princess of Love.

"Oh!" she piped. "I meant to tell you, Princess. I'm expecting a shipment of fireworks in a bit and often I would put them in my closet, but of course, I couldn't bring my closet on the train, so I was wondering if you had any place to store them until the event!"

Cadence smiled sweetly. "Of course, Pinkie Pie. There's plenty of room in the storage cellar. You can store them there until you can get a tent set up on the fairgrounds."

At that moment, another crystal guard stepped in and announced, "Your highness. There are a couple of ponies at the gates with

crates of explosives. They're being checked for certification. Were you expecting a delivery?"

"That must be Fire Cracker!" Pinkie Pie exclaimed as she bounced out of the throne room. "I'll take care of it!"

As the gate guards examined their papers, Dawn Cracker gazed up at the Crystal Palace above them. It was bigger than she had imagined. She wondered how many rooms there were and whether the princess used them all.

"Well, your certification for handling these types of explosives seems valid," one of the guards said. "However, we'll have to see some identification."

Fire Cracker sighed as he rummaged through his saddlebag. "Goodness. They certainly take a lot of precautions here."

Dawn cried out as she fell backward. She had been leaning back so far to see the top of the castle that she had lost her balance. Fire Cracker looked over his shoulder and laughed.

"Careful, honey. I know this place is a lot to take in, but don't kill yourself over it."

"It's okay, boys!" cried a high-pitched voice. "They're with me! I ordered these fireworks for the fair!"

Fire Cracker beamed at the sight of the pink pony. "Miss Pie! Pleasure to see…oomph!"

He gasped as Pinkie threw her hooves around his neck. "Oh, Cracker, you can call me Pinkie! All my friends do!"

"Right…" the red unicorn wheezed. "Pinkie…"

"This is going to be so much fun! First, we gotta get all these crates down to the storage cellar, and then we'll get you settled in a hotel and then I'll show you around the Crystal Empire and then we'll get the fireworks tent set up and move everything there!"

Pinkie Pie let go when she saw the lavender pony on the ground.

"Silly," she snorted. "You can't shoot fireworks from down there. You must be Dawn!"

She held out her hoof to help the unicorn up.

"Yeah," Dawn grunted. "Thanks."

Pinkie Pie's smile disappeared when the mare reached her eye-level. She squinted at the lavender unicorn and tilted her head in confusion. Dawn raised an eyebrow.

"What are you staring at?"

"Hmm," Pinkie uttered as she tapped her chin. "Have we met?"

"No."

"You look familiar. I can't quite put my hoof on it…"

The pink pony was now so close that their noses were touching. Dawn glanced at her father, but he only shrugged. Pinkie then smiled suddenly and backed away.

"Eh, I'll figure it out eventually. Come on, let's get this stuff moving!"

As the energetic mare bounced over to the crates, Dawn looked at her father.

"She's…interesting."

Fire Cracker shrugged again. "That's just how she is."

As the two unicorns began levitating the crates, Pinkie continued to stare at the lavender one.

"I could've sworn I've seen that face somewhere before…"

A lot of you are probably gonna hate me for the inclusion of Flash. I don't know why people hate him so much. After all, he's

not such a bad guy. So what if he's not fully developed in that Equestria Girls movie? That just gives us fanfic writers the opportunity to expand on his character.

The Meeting

In case anyone is confused: this story is in no way related to the "Bride of Discord" universe.

Dawn's mouth dropped open as soon as she saw the room Pinkie Pie had gotten for her and her father. It was small, but the walls were pink and the beds had lush pillows and the carpets were warm and fuzzy beneath her hooves.

"We're staying *here* all weekend?!"

"Yup!" Pinkie Pie chimed. "I would've hooked you up at the palace, but the guest rooms were booked."

"Are you kidding?!" Dawn exclaimed as she fell backward on one of the beds. She sighed at how soft it was. "I've died and gone to Heaven!"

Fire Cracker chuckled. "This was very generous of you, Pinkie."

Pinkie grinned. "Always willing to help out a friend!"

Dawn gasped when she noticed another door and galloped over to it. "What's in here?"

"Oh. That's the bathroom."

"You mean it comes with a *bathroom* too?!" She opened the door and stepped inside. "Wow, it's so clean and…"

She let out an ear-piercing scream.

"Dawnie, what's the matter?" Fire Cracker asked in concern.

"DAD, IT HAS A FREAKING BATHTUB!" They heard the sound of running water. "AND IT WORKS!"

Pinkie looked at the red unicorn questioningly.

"We live a…sheltered life," he explained before calling to his daughter. "Sweetie, isn't there something you'd like to say to Pinkie?"

The lavender pony poked her head out, wearing a big grin. "Oh, thank you! Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you! Hey, do these little soaps cost extra?"

"No, they're free," replied Pinkie.

"Good. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to take a good, looooooong bath!"

She squealed excitedly before slamming the door. Fire Cracker laughed and shook his head.

"Sorry, Pinkie. Guess we're going to have to wait on that tour."

"That's okay," Pinkie assured him. "My friends are expecting me anyway. Oh, but be at the fairgrounds at one o'clock! The fair is tomorrow and we've got to get busy, busy, busy!"

She was about to bounce away when she turned back to Fire Cracker.

"By the way, does Dawn have a sister?"

The stallion scrunched his nose. "No."

"A cousin?"

"No."

"Second cousin?"

"No."

"Third cousin six times removed by a ninth cousin?"

"Err…no."

"Any distant relatives of any kind that might look a teensy bit like Dawn?"

"The only other family we have is my Uncle Smokey, but we haven't heard from him since his ship left Horseshoe Bay."

Pinkie's eyes blinked and then narrowed in determination as she stomped down the hall. "I'll figure it out. I, Pinkamena Diane Pie, won't rest until I find out where I've seen that face before!"

Twilight gazed out the window of her room in the Crystal Palace. It was a splendid view. She could see almost the entire empire. She saw little crystal foals playing happily in the streets: jumping rope, bouncing balls, shooting marbles. She didn't need to hear them to know they were laughing.

She found it funny that she was envying them. After all, she didn't really do those things when she was a filly. Instead of playing with the other foals, she would sit on a patch of soft grass and read. It seemed like the more royal duties she fulfilled, the more she felt like she needed a break. Not just a few short hours to read, but a full day, maybe even longer.

Her head turned sharply at a soft knock. Flash Sentry was standing in the doorway.

"Permission to enter, your highness?"

Once Twilight was over her shock, she replied, "Granted."

He stepped into the room, but didn't approach her. "Princess Cadence asked me to call you back to the throne room to begin preparations for the fair."

"Oh," the alicorn uttered. "Right." She glanced back out the window. "The fair."

Of course he was only here on business, not because he wanted to talk to her or anything.

The guard raised an eyebrow and took a cautious step forward. "Is something wrong, your highness?"

Twilight winced and let out a groan as he said "your highness."

"You don't have to address me so formally, you know," she said coolly. "Just Twilight would be fine."

"Oh," Flash said, smiling a little. "Do you have all the royal guards call you Twilight?"

She was grateful he couldn't see her face, for she was blushing.

"Um…no?"

She winced as soon as she told the truth.

"Really?" Flash said slyly. "So I guess I'm a special case?"

A shiver ran up her spine at his tone. His professional air had completely dissolved now and he was sounding like the other Flash.

"Um…" she stammered. "Well, I…"

She gasped when she turned and found that he was standing right beside her. Now he could see her face for sure, and that it was turning as red as a tomato. She made the mistake of looking into his deep blue eyes. If she hadn't been sitting, her knees would've collapsed under her then and there.

She didn't know how long she had been staring, but Flash didn't give any sign that he minded. He just kept smiling that friendly smile, which didn't make the situation any better.

His shape was different, of course, but every other characteristic just reminded her of the human Flash: those eyes, that smile, that playful yet friendly tone.

She had to say something quick, or else she was going to lose it.

"Well, I…" she stuttered. "I-I just don't want t-t-to think of you as a… g-g-guard, b-but more as a…f-f-friend?"

She mentally slapped herself for sounding so stupid. She expected him to laugh, but instead, his smile just grew wider.

"Okay," he said with a bow. "As you command, your highness. Or should I say Twilight? Or Twi? How about just Light?"

The alicorn giggled at his playfulness, which eased her nerves. "Just Twilight, please."

"So, as a friend, may I ask what you were looking at out there?"

Her smile faded. "Oh. It was nothing. I was just watching the crystal ponies out there." She sighed. "They don't have to worry about anything. Well, now that Sombra's gone, anyway. They don't have any endless lists of royal duties to go through every day."

Flash tilted his head. "Princess Cadence told me you loved endless lists."

Twilight looked up at him with wide eyes and gulped. "W-what else did she say about me?"

"Oh, not much. Just that you're really smart and pretty and courageous and independent…" He paused. "Actually, she talks about you a lot."

I can only imagine why , the alicorn thought, her cheeks flushing again.

She suddenly felt so self-centered that they were only talking about her. She wanted to know more about him.

"So Flash…where are you from?"

"I…"

"Hello?"

The two tuned to see Spike standing in the doorway.

"We're all waiting for you guys!" the dragon complained as he held up a scroll. "Come on, we've got a schedule to keep!"

Twilight never thought she'd ever think this, but she was beginning to hate schedules.

"He's right," Flash admitted. "There's a lot to be done today."

"Yeah," she sighed.

He gave her one more smile before walking out the door. "I'll see you later."

She beamed. "Bye."

Twilight watched in awe as the handsome guard left. Spike followed her gaze and gave her a suspicious look. He crossed his arms.

"I know what you're thinking, Twilight."

"W-what?" she said, shaking out of her daze.

"Come on. I may be young, but I'm not stupid. A tall, handsome stallion, looks a lot like a guy you really got attached to in the other world…"

Twilight blushed for a second, but regained her composure. "So what if he reminds me of the other Flash? So what if he's… attractive?"

"Twilight, this isn't the same Flash Sentry you met in the other world. Sure, he has the same name and looks like him, but you still don't know him. He might not be anything like the other one."

"Why not? That other Rarity and Fluttershy and all the others were just like the ones in this world."

"Yeah, but…you should still be careful. I…I don't want you to get hurt, Twilight."

Twilight grinned and patted the dragon on the head. "It's sweet that you're looking out for me, Spike, but I can handle myself."

He smiled up at her. "Okay. Now," he held up his scroll, "the fair…"

She sighed. "Right."

It wasn't a total bummer. After preparations, they would have a whole day to enjoy the fair and she'd finally get the break she'd been wishing for.

"What's next on the list, Spike?" Twilight asked as they walked through the fairgrounds.

"Fireworks," Spike replied. "We have to set up the tent and store all the fireworks inside until the evening tomorrow."

"Let's see," the alicorn mused as she levitated the ground plan in front of her. "It should be over by the crystal corn stand."

They saw that Pinkie, Rainbow Dash and the Cutie Mark Crusaders were almost finished putting the tent up.

"How's it going, girls?" Twilight inquired.

The fillies grunted as they each held a rope in their mouth. After Rainbow hammered the three ropes into the ground with stakes, they shouted:

"Doing good!"

"Except this rope keeps running away from me!" Pinkie exclaimed as she tugged on her end. "Come on, rope! Stop slipping!"

She cried out as the rope pulled her forward. Suddenly, it stopped when Pinkie felt some pony else tug on the rope. She turned around and gasped when she saw who it was.

"Hey there, little darling!"

"CHEESE!" Pinkie squealed as she threw her hooves around the orange stallion.

"Pinkie!" Rainbow shouted.

In their excitement, Pinkie and Cheese had let go of the rope. Twilight snagged it with her magic and hammered it firmly into the ground.

"Sorry," Pinkie said guiltily before turning back to Cheese. "What are you doing here?"

He shrugged. "My Cheesy Sense told me there was a big party going on here involving you. And, well…" He blushed. "How could I *not* come?"

"It's good that you're here," Twilight smiled. "We need all the help we can get for this thing if we're gonna get it done by tomorrow. Rainbow, girls, get to work on the next tent."

"Roger!" Rainbow and the Cutie Mark Crusaders saluted before taking off.

"Now, Pinkie, where are those fireworks you promised us?"

"Coming through!" called a voice.

Twilight turned and gawked when she saw a tower of crates encased in a red aura. The unicorn stallion levitating them was panting heavily.

"Good heavens, Pinkie!" the princess exclaimed. "How many fireworks did you order?"

"Oh, just fifty," Pinkie replied nonchalantly.

"Fifty?" Cheese Sandwich repeated, crossing his hooves. "I'm surprised at you, Pinkie! Sure, fifty fireworks would be good for a birthday bash, but for an event like this, you'll need at least a hundred!"

"No, no, no, no, no! I meant fifty *crates* ."

His face lit up. "Oh. Well, in that case…" He snickered. "Get it? In that *case* ?!"

The two party ponies burst out laughing. Twilight shook her head

with a grin.

"Guess we can check fireworks off the list," she muttered to Spike.

As she walked away from the tent, she nearly bumped into another tower of boxes. Both she and the unicorn levitating them let out a cry.

"Oh gosh!" Twilight gasped.

"Who…what?" the pony on the other side of the crates uttered.

"Oh, excuse me!"

"It's no problem!"

"I'll just…walk around then."

"Yeah, you do that."

Twilight moved past the pony without glancing at her face. "Now, what's…?"

She trailed off when she noticed Spike looking curiously over his shoulder.

"Spike, what is it?"

The dragon squinted. "I thought I saw…" He shook his head. "Never mind."

Dawn heaved a sigh of relief that she hadn't crashed into that pony. She could've severely hurt her, or blown up the entire empire if she wasn't careful. No, she was overreacting. These fireworks were designed to only explode when lit. Still, she had to be prudent not to drop them.

She took in a deep breath the minute she set them down. She then noticed her father leaning against one of the crates, cradling his head.

"Another one of your migraines, Dad?" she asked gently.

"I'm fine," Fire Cracker said, holding up his hoof. "I just need a little rest."

Meanwhile, Pinkie Pie and Cheese Sandwich were counting the crates.

"I got twenty-three on my side," Pinkie declared.

"Twenty-two over here," said Cheese.

"Hey, there are only forty-five! Or maybe we miscounted."

She counted them again, by herself, this time, but she came up with the same number.

"That's funny," Fire Cracker said, rubbing his forehead. "We came here with fifty."

"We must have left some in the cellar by accident," Dawn suggested.

Her father grunted as he attempted to rise. "I'll get them."

"No," his daughter softly commanded. "You take a break, Dad. I'll get them."

As she exited the tent, Cheese Sandwich watched her with a confused look on his face.

"Hmm, she looks familiar," he muttered to Pinkie.

"You mean you see it too?" Pinkie asked. "I've been trying to figure out where I've seen her before all day! And she doesn't have a sister or a third cousin six times removed by a ninth cousin."

"Well, I've traveled all of Equestria. I could've seen her at one of my parties. Where does she live?"

"Hoofington."

Cheese tapped his chin. "Hoofington, Hoofington, Hoofington…" He paused and then shrugged. "Nope. Not ringing any bells."

"Ooh! There's a crystal bell tower not far from here! Maybe that'll help!"

Most ponies would've scratched their heads at this idea, but Cheese Sandwich just grinned.

"That's a fantastic idea!"

"Race ya there!"

The two party ponies skidded off at the speed of lightning. Fire Cracker, who had only heard half their conversation, was scratching his head, as most ponies would've done. After a while, he couldn't help but chuckle.

"They make a perfect couple."

"…apple fritters, apple dumplings and apple brown betties!"

Twilight and Spike were checking on the food in the palace kitchen and Applejack had just finished listing the number of baked goods she had ready and in the oven.

"Come mornin' light," the cowgirl declared, "my apple cart will be filled with delicious treats!"

"Food: check!" Spike said proudly. "Okay, next we need to check on the rides."

"Princess Twilight?"

The alicorn lit up at the voice and turned to the stallion in the doorway. "Flash! Nice to see you again!"

Spike blinked. "Uh…you just saw him two hours ago."

Twilight blushed awkwardly, but Flash grinned.

"Nice to see you too, Princess."

"I told you," the alicorn insisted. "Call me Twilight."

"Actually, Princess Cadence sent me."

Her ears drooped. "Of course, she did."

"She and Prince Shining Armor wish to see you in the throne room as soon as possible."

"Oh. Alright. Spike, you stay here."

The dragon heaved a sigh. "Finally! Now I can get to reading this!"

He took a *Power Ponies* comic book out of his backpack. While Twilight wasn't a connoisseur of comics, she saw that it was brand new.

"Where'd you get that?"

"At the Crystal Comic Bookstore," Spike replied as he sat on a flour sack in the corner. "Did you know they had a comic store here?"

Applejack chuckled. "Don't worry. I'll make sure he doesn't get sucked into this one."

The mares laughed at their inside joke. Spike grunted while Flash raised an eyebrow.

"What was that about?" he asked Twilight as he walked alongside her down the hallway.

"Long story," the princess giggled. "Let's just say Spike's not allowed to buy from the House of Enchanted Comics ever again."

A long, awkward period of silence followed. Once again, Twilight was trying to find the appropriate topic to bring up.

"So…any idea what Cadence and Shining Armor want? Is there a problem of some sort?"

"Beats me," Flash replied with a shrug. "All I know is that Princess Cadence looked distressed while reading a letter from Canterlot and asked me to get you at once."

When they entered the throne room, Cadence was pacing back and forth, looking uncomfortable. Shining Armor was standing off to the side, growing more worried with every second he watched his wife.

"What's going on?" Twilight asked.

Cadence paused and bit her lip. "Flash, I wish to discuss this matter with Twilight in private."

The guard bowed. "Of course, your highness."

He took the liberty of shutting the doors behind him, leaving the three royals to their matters. Cadence looked sincerely at her sister-in-law.

"Twilight, you are familiar with my cousin, Prince Blueblood?"

The younger alicorn cringed at the mention of the prince. She had never met him, but Rarity had told her he was rude, stuck-up and full of himself. Twilight responded to the question with a slow nod.

"Well," Cadence said, glancing at her hooves, "I just received word from him that he's coming to the Crystal Fair, and…he wishes to meet you."

Twilight tilted her head. "Meet me?"

"Now, Twilie," Shining Armor said, stepping toward his sister, "you should know that since he is a prince, your only duty is to treat him with respect."

"I knew that, but why is his coming here such a big deal?"

Cadence looked away. "There have been rumors…and…this isn't the first time Blueblood's asked to meet you…"

"Well, sure. He'd probably want to know all the royals."

"That's not all. You see…for some time, my cousin's been looking for a wife and…he originally was going to settle for a young duchess or some mare of high society. But since you came and…well, you're the only princess who isn't related to him…he might…"

Twilight's eyes widened as the pieces came together. "Are you saying that Prince Blueblood wants to marry me?"

The pink alicorn nodded. Twilight looked to her brother in desperation.

"But I don't have to, do I? I mean there are no arranged marriages anymore, right? You guys married for love, didn't you?"

"We're not asking you to marry him, Twilight," Shining Armor assured her.

"Then why are you telling me all this?"

"We're telling you this so you can be on your guard," Cadence explained. "You have every right to refuse his advances, if he makes any. However, you must still show him courtesy. Obnoxious as my cousin is, he's still a prince. You don't have to go anywhere with him. The worst you'll have to do is talk with him or sit beside him in the banquet hall. It is customary for the royals to sit at the high end of the table. All I'm saying is that while he is visiting, be kind but firm with him."

Twilight bit her lip. "When's he arriving?"

"A few hours."

"Don't worry, Twilie," Shining Armor said, putting a hoof around his sister. "If he tries anything, he'll answer to me."

She sighed. "Okay."

Shining Armor and Cadence exchanged a confused glance.

"I didn't expect you to be excited," the latter said, "but…is something else bothering you, Twilight?"

Twilight looked up at her sister-in-law. "Remember a short while ago when I said I wanted to play a bigger role in Equestria? Well, now I feel like it's too big of a role." She hung her head. "I know, I know. I must seem very nit-picky, but… Lately, it's been nothing but duty after duty. While I'm happy to perform every one of them, I…I feel

like I need a break. I haven't spent any real quality time with my friends in weeks, and there's hardly a moment where I can just… well, do nothing."

Cadence stared down at the younger alicorn and smiled. "I understand, Twilight."

"You do?"

The pink princess walked towards one of the windows and motioned for the other to follow.

"When I was a teenager," she began, "I had the same problem. There were times when I just wanted to hang out with my friends or your brother. However, royal duties would get in the way every now and then. I'm going to tell you the same thing Aunt Celestia told me when I approached her with this issue."

She glanced out the window. "Look at those ponies out there. What do you see?"

Twilight followed her gaze and grinned down at the foals running about. "Young fillies and colts that have no royal duties to worry about?"

"They may not have *royal* duties, but they still have duties. They have a duty to obey their parents, to go to sleep on time, to eat their greens, to go to school and do their homework, so they can learn and grow up well. And look at that carrot dog vendor over there. He has a duty to make and sell carrot dogs so he can feed himself and his family. Even that grandmother there has a duty: to take care of herself in her golden years and watch over her grandchildren."

Cadence turned to Twilight again. "Don't you see? Every pony, big and small, no matter what their station, has a duty in life. Usually, that duty must come before pleasure."

The lavender alicorn sighed. "I guess. But don't all ponies deserve a break? Even for just one day?"

Her sister-in-law grinned. "I'll promise you this. Tomorrow, when all preparations are done, you can go out and enjoy the fair without me

asking you for any more favors. Does that sound good?"

This cheered Twilight up a little, but the thought of Prince Blueblood and a possible crowd of groupies following her all day kept her blues at bay.

As Dawn carried the last five crates through the crystal halls, she couldn't help but gaze at the wonders around her. She paused at beautiful stain glass windows depicting the history of the Crystal Empire. Even a doorknob made her gasp, for nearly everything was made of pure, sparkling crystal.

"Princess Cadence must love living here," she muttered to herself. "I wonder how long it takes to polish this place. How many servants would it even take?"

She was snapped out of her thoughts as one of the boxes slid off the top. She discovered it in time and quickly caught it before it could hit the floor.

"Focus, Dawn," she whispered. "Don't drop them, don't drop them, don't drop them…"

She stopped suddenly and found herself in an unfamiliar hallway.

"Okay, where am I?"

Around the corner, Princess Twilight was walking slowly with her head down.

"Just what I need," she mumbled. "A stuck-up prince coming to court me."

The very thought of Prince Blueblood standing within two inches of her made her shudder. While she had never spoken with the prince, she had seen him a couple of times, so she knew what he looked like. Even as a teenager, she had not found the prince very attractive. She didn't know why. There was something about his suave appearance that made her uncomfortable.

Would he even be nice to her? He hadn't treated her friend Rarity very courteously. Even if he did act the opposite towards her, would it be because he really liked her or because she was a princess? That went hand in hand with the question of why he wanted to court her. She was the only princess in the land who wasn't his relative. In his eyes, she was his only option.

"Maybe if I act so horrible, he would give up on me." She sighed. "But I have to be polite to him, or else I'll let Cadence down."

Meanwhile, Dawn was spinning around, trying to figure out which way to go. She'd only been in this castle once before, but had been concentrating so much on the crates that she hadn't been paying attention to where she had been going.

"Do I go this way or…? Oh!"

She hastily caught another falling crate.

"Phew! Okay. So the cellar's back there, so if I go back the way I came…" She paused again. "Or did I come from this way? Or did I…? Ugh! Everything looks the same!"

Twilight paused when she heard a shout from around the corner. "Hello?"

"Gah!"

The voice startled Dawn, breaking her concentration. The pink aura disappeared from the crates and they plummeted to the floor. Dawn gasped and caught them with her magic, but her hold on them was unstable. They started drifting towards her.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa!"

She maneuvered around to the other side of the crates so they would miss her. Unfortunately, her sudden move created a pull on them and they floated towards her again. This time, faster.

"Oh boy!" she cried, backing away.

"Hello?" Twilight called again as she rounded the corner.

"Yipe!"

The crystal floor caused Dawn's hooves to slip out from under her. She landed on her rear and started sliding backwards across the floor, the rogue boxes pursuing her. Twilight finally looked in the direction of the noise.

"Is someone…? Gah!"

"Incoming!"

There was a loud crash as one mare collided into the other and the boxes, released from Dawn's magic, fell on top of them. The wooden crates burst open and firework shells flooded the place.

Twilight crawled out of the pile, tossing a broken plank off her head.

"What in the…?"

Her ears perked up when she heard a painful groan. She turned and saw a lavender rear end and dark blue tail sticking out from under the sea of unlit fireworks.

"Oh goodness!" the princess exclaimed as she climbed over the mess. "Don't worry! I'll get you out of there."

Her horn glowed pink and she gently pulled the mare out of the clutter. It was a unicorn about her age with a dark blue mane.

"Are you okay?" Twilight asked, holding out her hoof.

Dawn glanced up at the lavender hoof and slowly took it.

"Yeah," she grunted as the stranger helped her up. "Thank…you."

I know, I'm mean. MWAHAHAHAHAHA!

Though the chapter was getting lengthy and I don't usually like my chapter exceeding 7000 words, so I split it up.

Cheese Sandwich popped out of nowhere. And

yes...Blueblood's going to be in this. I find it interesting how I've never really written about him yet. Might be a new challenge.

The Switch

This was a tough chapter to write, plus there was BronyCon in the way. I had to watch various versions of The Prince and the Pauper for inspiration when I was stuck (you've probably noticed I started some PMVs on the Barbie version).

Both mares were silent as purple eyes met purple eyes. They simultaneously lifted a hoof to brush the bangs out of those eyes, dark blue bangs that fell just below the brow, parted on the side. Two lavender faces slowly leaned towards each other until their noses were an inch apart.

One mare took a step to her right, so did the other. They circled around each other, their matching eyes not breaking contact, until they had changed positions. As if they were mirroring each other, they both reached out a hoof and touched the other's face. When they realized the other was real, they let out equal gasps.

They slowly put down their hooves and continued to stare.

The pony standing before Dawn had her face, her eyes, and her color! Her mane was also dark blue, only it was longer and straighter, with pink and purple highlights.

Twilight was shocked at the resemblance this strange mare had to her. The only difference so far seemed to be their manes. While this pony's was dark blue, it was shorter and messier, with wisps sticking out from behind her neck, and there were no other colors woven into it. That's how she knew she wasn't a changeling. A changeling would've copied her completely.

Despite the small differences, they could've been twins.

After a few more seconds of silence, Twilight exclaimed, "Not again!"

That broke the trance. Dawn blinked back in confusion.

"Not again?"

Twilight leaned forward and tilted her head as she studied the unicorn's face. "You're not by any chance from the future, are you? Or an alternate universe?"

Dawn blinked again. "Not that I know of. Wait." She scrunched her nose. "You mean that actually happened to you?"

The princess bit her lip. "Yes."

"Which one? The future thing or the alternate universe thing?"

"Both, actually."

"Say what?"

"Never mind. It's just…so mind-blowing…"

"I know, right? It's just so…"

"Whoa," they said together.

They gasped. "You even sound like…" They shook their heads. "You look just like…" They winced. "You're…"

After saying their fourth sentence together, their mouths broke into smiles and those smiles turned into laughs.

"You're not another me, are you?" Twilight giggled.

Dawn scoffed. "Not unless we're twins separated at birth, but I think my parents would've mentioned that little detail."

"It's just remarkable!" The princess circled round the unicorn, taking in every detail of her. "I mean the fur color, the facial and bone structure, the height, the mane and eye color… It's virtually impossible for two random ponies to have this many physical traits in common!"

"Well, I think this would disprove that statement."

"What's your name?" they asked at once.

Twilight giggled. "You first."

The unicorn held out her hoof. "Dawn Cracker. Pleased to meet ya."

The alicorn raised an eyebrow as she shook her hoof. "Dawn Cracker?"

"You know, like the crack of dawn?" She sighed. "Dad thought it was clever."

"I think it's a pretty name."

"Well, you'd be the first. And you are?"

The alicorn was delighted that for once, she wasn't recognized. "My name is Twilight Sparkle."

Dawn's eyes widened as she heard the name. She then glanced at her doppelganger's back and noticed the wings for the first time.

"Oh my gosh!" she shouted, instantly dropping to the floor and bowing her head. "Forgive me, your highness, for running into you! I am such a klutz! And forgive me for not recognizing you!"

Twilight stifled a laugh. "No need for that. I'm really not used to being bowed to. And don't worry, it was an accident."

Dawn looked up, nervousness lingering in her eyes. "Sorry!"

"No need to apologize."

"Sorry!" the unicorn shouted, scrambling to her hooves.

Twilight chuckled. "Wow. You really *are* like me!" She tapped her chin. "I wonder how alike we are."

Dawn glanced at her rear. "Well, for one thing, I don't have wings. We also don't have the same cutie mark."

"And your tail is shorter," the alicorn added.

"Yeah, I like my hair cut short. I also don't have those fancy highlights. Say, they look pretty good! Where'd you get them done?"

"Um…my hair is natural."

Dawn got down on the floor again. "Oh, I'm sorry, your highness!"

"It's okay. And enough with the "your highness." You may call me Twilight."

The unicorn looked up in awe. "Really?"

"Sure. After all, you could be my sister, so it only seems fair."

Dawn smiled and stood up, but as she did, her hoof stepped on one of the firework sticks and she nearly tripped.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed as she glanced around at the mess. "I'm supposed to get these to my dad at the fireworks tent!"

"Oh!" Twilight grinned. "So you're Fire Cracker's daughter! Pinkie told me about you." She gazed at her face. "Though she didn't bring up the important details…"

Dawn chuckled. "Now I know why she thought I looked familiar."

"Here, I'll help you clean up."

"Oh, I can't let you do that. You're a princess and…"

"It's no problem, really. I love cleaning up."

She used her magic and started mending the crates. Dawn stared slack-jawed at her horn. Twilight noticed.

"What?"

"Something else we have in common!"

Dawn lit up her horn as she began organizing the fireworks sticks. Twilight gasped at the fact that their magical auras were both magenta.

"Amazing," she uttered. "So what else do we have in common?"

"How about you ask a question and then I ask a question?" Dawn suggested.

"Fair enough." The princess continued her mending as she asked her first question: "How do you feel about books?"

"Oh, I love books! I don't own a lot though and don't have a lot of time to read."

"I can't even count the number of books I've read! I used to live in a library full of them!"

"Wow! I can only imagine that may books!"

Twilight chuckled. "It's funny. Just the other night I was reading *The Prince and the Pauper* ."

Dawn stopped levitating the fireworks and gasped. "No kidding?! That's my favorite book!"

"Really?"

"Yeah! I read a bit of it almost every night, including last night!"

The two locked eyes and stared at each other's faces again.

"I've heard of uncanny coincidences," Twilight said, "but you have to admit, even in a magical world, this is just incredible!"

"I know!" Dawn exclaimed. Then she frowned suddenly. "Huh. I guess that means I'm the pauper."

The princess' face fell. "Oh. Are you…poor?"

The unicorn shrugged. "Only compared to…most. At least we have a roof over our heads…for now."

"Gee."

"But we get by. I mean come on. It could be worse, right?"

"I suppose." Twilight felt she should change the subject. "Okay. Your turn."

"Hmm," Dawn said, tapping her chin. "Do you like comic books?"

"Not really, but Spike does."

"Spike?"

"My baby dragon. He's my closest friend and number one assistant. I've never read his comics, but we did get sucked into one."

Dawn gasped. "Really? That's so cool! How'd that happen?"

"Word of advice: don't shop at the House of Enchanted Comics."

The unicorn giggled. "You mean they're *literally* enchanted?"

"Yup, and a whole lot of trouble. Next question: do you study, and if so, what?"

"I don't really study much, except pyrotechnics. It's a job requirement, you know?"

"I once read a book on pyrotechnics. It sounds complicated."

"Not really. Roll up a tube, toss in some stars, sprinkle some black powder, light the end and boom! Aerial fireworks! Dad and I have been making them together since I got my cutie mark. Well, of course, I wasn't allowed to handle the chemicals until I was older."

"I've been studying magic since I first saw Celestia raise the summer sun, as well as anything else that interests me, mostly science, history and rhetoric."

"Sheesh. Where do you find the time to learn all that?"

Twilight hung her head. "I don't. Not anymore, anyway."

Dawn wondered what that meant and was about to ask when a sudden pain in her head interrupted her. Her magic stopped as she put her hoof to her head and dropped the fireworks she had been

levitating.

"Are you okay?" Twilight asked.

"No," the unicorn groaned. "My head hurts."

The princess looked at her closely. "Have you been sleeping well?"

"You kidding? I *never* sleep well! I stayed up all night finishing this order and had to catch the early train!"

"That would explain it. Working too hard and not getting enough sleep can affect your magic. It happens to me sometimes."

"This happens at least three times a week."

"Goodness. Maybe you should get some rest." Twilight entwined her foreleg with hers. "Come on. My room's on this floor. You can lie on my bed for a bit."

"Oh, but I don't want to be a bother, Princess."

"Don't be silly. A princess is always willing to help her subjects, as well as her friends."

"But the fireworks, I'm supposed to get them to my dad and…"

Twilight's horn glowed. "We'll just bring them along with us. Besides, we won't really need them until tomorrow night."

"No, I can carry them myself…"

"You're in no condition to do such a thing at the moment."

"But…"

"No arguments!"

Dawn sighed in defeat. She really didn't want to argue with a princess, but she still felt bad that a royal was carrying her load and walking her down the hall. It just didn't sit right, but then again, Twilight wasn't what she expected a princess to be like. So far, she had treated her like an equal rather than another common subject.

Was she always like that or was she only being nice because they were lookalikes?

How did that happen anyway? How was it that she resembled a princess? They'd already ruled out the possibility that they were long-lost twins.

Twilight was wondering the same thing. Perhaps they were distant cousins and shared a great-great-great-great-great-grandparent or something? A part of her was still saying Dawn was a changeling, but if so, why would the changeling not copy her completely?

When they reached Twilight's room, Dawn let out a gasp and she suddenly felt lighter than air.

" *This* is your room?!" she exclaimed as she gazed at the glittering crystal walls and furniture.

"Only during my visit," Twilight replied.

"Still! By Celestia's beard, this is amazing!"

The alicorn raised an eyebrow. "Um, Celestia doesn't have a beard…"

"I mean look at the floor! So shiny, I can see myself! And a closet!" She opened the green armoire up and gawked at the colorful gowns. "So many dresses!" She felt the fabric. "Is this silk?"

"Actually, it's satin, but…"

"And the bed!" She walked over to the purple queen-sized bed. "It's the biggest bed I've ever seen!"

"It's really not that big…"

"Oh my!" Dawn squealed as she touched the mattress with her hoofs. "It's so…soft!"

Without asking, she leapt backward onto the bed, spread out her legs and let out a content sigh.

"Forget Heaven! I'm in Elysium!"

Twilight blinked. "Technically, Heaven and Elysium are one in the same, both being spiritual utopian worlds for departed…"

"Who cares? It's paradise!"

The alicorn smiled at the unicorn's enthusiasm. "I suppose it is a nice room…"

Dawn propped herself up on her elbow. "Nice? Didn't you hear me comparing it with Elysium? What I'd give to have a room like this!"

"Oh, what's your room like?" Twilight asked as she seated herself on the bed beside her.

"It's a mess! And it's cramped! And the bed is lumpy!"

"Why not get a new mattress? Or at least clean things up a bit?"

"Any idea how much a mattress costs? And I don't have time to clean things up!"

"Hmm," Twilight uttered, rubbing her chin.

She summoned a blackboard in front of them and in chalk drew a two-column chart. One column was labeled "Similarities," the other "Differences."

"Okay, so first there's our faces," Twilight said, putting a mark in the first column, "then our eyes, our mane color, our fur color…"

"What are you doing?" Dawn questioned.

"Just keeping track of how many traits we have in common and how many we don't. For instance, under "Differences," I would put one tally to represent our separate cutie marks and then one more for my tidiness and your sloppiness."

"Hey!"

"I just want to see how alike we really are."

Dawn tilted her head at the blackboard and shrugged. "Okay, I'll bite. Might be fun."

"Let me just put a few more tallies. Hmm, so we like to read, I'm a princess and you're…um, not; we have the same height; I have a greater habit of studying…"

An hour later, the doppelgangers were laughing on the bed.

"Okay, I've got one!" Dawn declared. "This is a little weird, but how do you feel about…ketchup and peanut butter sandwiches?"

Twilight gasped and then narrowed her eyes at her. "I *love* them."

"No kidding? Most ponies think it's gross!"

"I know, right? Though personally, I don't blame them for that thought. It's not a combination you would initially think of."

"Well, when ketchup is cheaper than jelly, you take what you can get."

"Okay," Twilight said as she made a tally on the board. "So far that's eighteen similarities and twenty-seven differences. Seems most of what we share in common are our physical traits."

"It's no biggy. This just proves we're not clones."

"Then how *do* we look so much alike then?"

Dawn shrugged. "You know what? It could just be one of those funny twists of Fate. It's best not to question it."

Twilight sighed. "I suppose you're right. If there's one thing I learned, it's that Fate has a funny way of sneaking up on you." She tapped her chin. "Then again… Dawn, when's your birthday?"

"April 25th. Why?"

The alicorn dropped her piece of chalk. "That's *my* birthday!"

Dawn's mouth dropped open. "Seriously?"

"Yes! At 6:37 P.M.!"

"I don't know what time I was born, just that my parents told me it was at the crack of dawn. That's how I got my name."

"I was born just as the sun was setting, at twilight!"

Both were silent for a while.

"That's the connection!" Twilight exclaimed. "We were born on the same day! Somehow, that made us identical!"

"Wow," Dawn whispered. "But…why?"

"I don't know. Guess it is Fate after all."

"But I mean…we're from completely different worlds! You're a princess for crying out loud! By the way, how come you don't wear a crown?"

"Oh. I just don't like to wear it that often."

"But you still have a crown, right?"

"Of course."

Dawn sprang up excitedly. "Can I see?"

"Sure. Give me a second."

Twilight used her magic to open her side table drawer and take out her golden crown with the five magenta gems encrusted into its points. Dawn's jaw dropped again as the beautiful headpiece floated into her hooves.

"Whoa," she uttered, staring at the gems. "Are…are these real?"

"They're four carats each," Twilight explained.

"It's so…shiny!"

"I suppose it's nice, but my old crown…"

"Can I, um…?"

Dawn pointed to her head.

"Go ahead. I won't mind."

The unicorn grinned widely and placed the crown on her head. She rushed over to crystal vanity and examined herself in the mirror. She gazed in awe as she adjusted the tiara.

"Whoa," she said again, not taking her eyes off her reflection. "You are *so* lucky, Twilight! You have *everything* !"

Twilight beamed. "I don't know about *everything* …"

"You're a *princess* ! You live in a castle, wear a crown, can do whatever you want whenever you want…"

"Not really," the alicorn sighed, walking to the window with her head down. "Whenever I want to do something, something else always gets in the way."

Dawn huffed. "Tell me about it! I have to work two jobs!"

"At least you don't have ponies asking you for favors all the time or following you wherever you go."

"You mean adoring fans and reporters putting you on the front pages of magazines? Man, that would be cool! No pony really knows me back in Hoofington. The only friends I have are Daphne and my dad. Well, at least while working, I'm spending time with them."

"I *wish* I had more time with *my* friends. Now I'm always busy. At least when I was still a regular old unicorn, I did my own scheduling. Now for the first time in my life, I'm wishing for a day without schedules!"

"But you can order ponies around, get them to do whatever! No pony tells *you* what to do!"

"You'd be surprised. I don't mind helping with the fair, and I'd do anything for Cadence, but sometimes…I just wish I wouldn't have to do anything or be anywhere for once. Now I've got this prince wanting to marry me…"

"Prince?!" Dawn exclaimed, gaping at her. "You don't mean…Prince *Blueblood* ?!"

"Yeah," Twilight sighed.

" *Prince Blueblood* wants to marry *you* ?!"

"Yeah, but I don't want to."

"But he's so handsome!" Dawn blushed. "Of course, I've never seen him myself, but I hear he's an Adonis!"

"He's also pig-headed and self-centered."

"Oh, he can't be that bad. He is a *prince* , after all. Aren't princes supposed to be charming?"

The alicorn snorted. "He's an exception to the rule."

Dawn didn't seem to hear that last comment as she gazed back in the mirror. She continued playing with the crown. Twilight smiled as she appeared in the mirror with her.

"It really is remarkable," she mused.

"I know, this crown is gorgeous!" the unicorn marveled.

"No, I meant the resemblance between us!"

"Oh, right," Dawn sighed, "except you're a beautiful princess."

"You're just as attractive, Dawn. We have the same face."

"Yeah, but you wear it better. Besides, I've got this rat's nest for a mane."

"Hmm," Twilight tapped her chin. "I wonder…" She turned to Dawn and illuminated her horn. "Hold still. I'd like to try something."

Dawn spun around in alarm. "What?"

She screamed as the princess shot a beam at her. When the light diminished, Dawn looked down at her body to see if any damage had been done. She gasped when she saw long dark blue locks of hair hanging down her shoulders. She touched them curiously.

"It's so…" she whispered, "smooth. And straight!"

She looked at her behind and saw that her tail had grown too. She reached back, stroked it and found that it was as smooth as her mane. She glanced back in the mirror and gasped again. She touched every part of her mane to be sure it was hers.

It was the same style as Twilight's.

"Sweet Celestia," she muttered. "I'm… *hot* !"

Twilight gazed in amazement at their almost matching reflections. "You look just like me!"

"Except you have those wicked highlights!"

"Just a moment."

After another spell, Dawn had streaks of pink and purple in her mane and tail. Twilight couldn't get over how incredible this was, for now Dawn looked just like the princess back when she was a unicorn, with the exception of her cutie mark.

"I could be you!" Dawn exclaimed, echoing the alicorn's thoughts.

The unicorn straightened up and put on a bored face.

"I, Princess Twilight Sparkle," she said in an uppity tone, "hereby command thee to fetch me my slippers!"

"I do not talk like that!" Twilight insisted, though she couldn't help but snicker.

"Maybe not in your head!"

They both laughed before looking back at themselves in the mirror and giving out a collective sigh.

"Silly, huh?" Dawn huffed, touching the crown again. "I mean come on. Me, a princess?"

Twilight's eyes widened as an idea formed in her head. She then glanced at Dawn and grinned mischievously. The unicorn saw this in the mirror and looked at the princess, frightened.

"Oh boy," she said. "I know that look. I get that look every time I plot revenge on my boss! You've got something diabolical on your mind! I know you're a princess and all, but whatever it is can't be good!"

Twilight's grin widened. "I have the most ingenious, though incredibly risky, plan ever!"

Dawn gulped. "What?"

"Oh, come on. Don't tell me you weren't thinking it."

"Thinking what?"

The alicorn rolled her eyes. "We look alike, you want to be a princess, and I want a break from being a princess, so…"

The unicorn blinked a few times before she gasped in realization. "Oh no…"

"You and I will trade places for the day, just like in *The Prince and the Pauper* !"

"Are you sure that…?"

Twilight ignored her as she quickly cast a spell to transform her mane and tail into Dawn's original style.

"I'll be you and you'll be me, and we'll switch back before any pony finds out!"

"But…" Dawn stammered. "We can't…can we?"

"It worked in the book, didn't it?"

"Yeah, but things went like totally wrong! I mean Prince Edward got kidnapped by Tom's drunken father and Tom almost became King without even knowing how to run a kingdom!"

"That won't happen. Equestria has no queen and your father's not a drunk, is he?"

"Well, no, but…what if we get caught? I mean…if I'm found out, won't I get thrown in jail for impersonating a princess? Or even…?"

Dawn gasped and grasped her neck in panic.

"Oh, it won't be for long," Twilight assured her. "What say we switch back tomorrow at three, before the fair is over? That way, we can both enjoy the fair and I can conduct the closing ceremonies with the other princesses and you can shoot the fireworks?"

"But…"

"Everything will be fine," Twilight said, putting her hoof on the unicorn's shoulder. "Think of this as a science experiment! Aren't you even the least bit curious to see if this'll work?"

Dawn glanced back at her reflection and the crown on her head. *Me, a princess* . It was her wish coming true. The opportunity was literally staring at her in the face. The question was: should she take it?

"Just one teeny problem," she said. "You're an *alicorn* ! At least Edward and Tom were both unicorns! Wouldn't they find it suspicious if the princess suddenly didn't have wings?"

"Huh," Twilight said, rubbing her chin. "That *is* a problem."

The princess mentally went through every spell she had learned, trying to find one that would help. She'd never heard of a spell to turn one type of pony into another. The only one she knew could do that was Discord, but she was a little hesitant in calling him. Sure, he wouldn't pass up a chaotic opportunity such as this, but she wasn't sure she could count on him changing them back.

Then she wondered how she had become an alicorn in the first place. Celestia had never really explained it to her. Was that also thanks to Discord? Had Celestia cast a powerful spell that only she could perform?

That reminded her of another spell, one she had discovered in an old book in the Castle of the Two Sisters. She had used it once to turn herself and her friends into breezies. According to the book, transformation spells were so complicated that only an alicorn or unicorn with advanced magic could cast them. As a unicorn, transforming inanimate objects had been difficult, but as an alicorn, turning six ponies into breezies had been…well, a breeze.

She looked back at her wings and then at Dawn.

"Yes," she grinned. "It just might work."

"What might work?" Dawn asked, not sure if she wanted to know the answer.

Twilight placed her hooves firmly on the ground. "Just stand still. This won't hurt a bit."

"Wait, what're you doing?"

"Trust me. I've done this before. Once."

The unicorn bit her lip and shut her eyes tight. The princess wouldn't vaporize her, right?

Twilight closed her eyes too, but calmly. Her horn glowed slowly for a few seconds before emitting a ball of light. Dawn's eyes shot open as she was lifted into the air. A beam shot out of the alicorn's horn and hit the unicorn in the chest. Twilight then turned to the mirror and fired another beam. It bounced off the mirror towards herself. Now light was spiraling around her as she faced Dawn again, who closed her eyes as she was blinded by the next emission of light.

Far away in the mountains, in a land where rivers were made of chocolate and peppermint trees sprouted from the ground, the Lord

of Chaos slept on a pink cloud made from cotton candy. He buried his face in the soft stickiness as he dreamt.

"I would love to have tea with you…" he mumbled. "Fluttershy…"

He woke with a start as his body started wriggling all over, causing him to fall and hit his head on the ground. He cursed himself for making it cement.

Discord rubbed his head as he reflected on the chaotic vibe he had just had.

"Now what in the world was *that* ?!"

"I don't believe it…" Twilight whispered.

Dawn didn't know how long her eyes had been closed, but it had apparently been a while, for she could hear Twilight giggling.

"You can look now, Dawn."

The unicorn hesitantly opened her eyes and gasped at the pony in front of her. If looking at Twilight hadn't been like looking in a mirror before, it certainly was now.

"W-what happened to your wings?"

The ex-alicorn smiled and pointed to the mirror. Dawn turned her head and screamed, nearly falling over. Once she had balanced herself, she looked again.

Sticking out of her back were two enormous purple wings.

"What in the…?" the former unicorn uttered, spinning in a circle to get a better look at the wings. "I'm a… How did you…?"

"An old spell I found in a book at the Castle of the Two Sisters," Twilight explained. "It changed our forms without changing our magical capabilities, so I'll be able to change us back." She chuckled. "Now you look like a *real* princess!"

Dawn gazed back in the mirror and smiled. "You know? I think we can really pull this off!"

She squealed in delight as she touched her wings. Then she frowned at the firework on her flank.

"You wouldn't happen to have a spell to change our cutie marks, would you?"

Twilight cringed. "Trust me. You do *not* want to go there. However…"

Her horn glowed again and summoned a paintbrush and several buckets of different color paints. She dipped the brush in magenta and flew it across Dawn's flank. After adding more colors, she did some painting on her flank, and soon the lookalikes had each other's cutie marks.

"That should do it," Twilight said, poofing the paints away. "Now to teach you everything you need to know if you're going to be me for a day."

She summoned a flipchart and a pointer. She flipped the first page and pointed to a picture of Spike.

"Okay, first there's Spike, my number one assistant and friend. He was given to me as an egg, the same day Princess Celestia made me her protégé…"

"…and that's how I got my castle. Did you get all that? Dawn?"

"Huh, wha…?" Dawn exclaimed as she awoke from her slumber.

Twilight tilted her head. "Did you hear any of what I said?"

"Oh, yeah, but…could you go back to the part about your daily nutrition? I kinda spaced out with all the talk of food."

The princess sighed and made the flipchart vanish. "I'll sum it up. Best friends: Spike, Applejack, Pinkie Pie, Rarity, Rainbow Dash

and Fluttershy. Show every pony courtesy, stand up straight and if you don't know the answer to something, just say "That's fine," or "I completely disagree." Got that?"

Dawn nodded hesitantly. "I think I do."

"Now, what do I need to know about being you?"

The former unicorn shrugged. "My dad's the red unicorn with the beard. Oh, and in case you have to make fireworks…"

"I read all about them. It shouldn't be too hard."

"Are you sure? I mean I'm used to it, but it can be dangerous…"

"If I can take on the magic of four alicorns, how hard could creating a few explosions be?"

"Wait. I'm an alicorn now. Am I gonna have to perform some fancy spell or…fly?!"

"You shouldn't have to, unless there's an impending disaster, but what could happen in one day? And don't worry about the flying. I'm not so good at it either."

The door swung open before they could discuss anything further.

"Twilight?" Spike called. "Are you in…wha?"

The dragon's jaw dropped when he saw Twilight and a mare that looked a great deal like her.

"What the…she's…who…how…?"

"Oh, you must be Spike!" Twilight said with a grin.

"Huh?" Dawn said. "But I thought you knew…?"

Twilight nudged her in the side and winked. It took a second for the disguised unicorn to get the message.

"Oh, right! Hi, uh, Spike! This is Twi…I mean…Dawn! Yes, this is Dawn! And I'm Twilight! Princess Twilight Sparkle, that's me!"

Twilight tried her best not to shake her head. "Right! Um, thanks for your help, Princess."

"My help?"

"You know, with my headache?"

"Oh, yes, of course! Yeah, well…you best get going. Don't you have those *fireworks* to deliver?"

"Right!"

Twilight stepped out the door and levitated the crates in the hallway.

"It was, um, nice meeting you, Princess! You too, Spike!"

The disguised princess trotted down the hall and snickered when she was sure Spike couldn't hear her. Meanwhile, the dragon was watching her in shock.

"She…" he pointed. "She looks just like you!"

"I know," Dawn laughed nervously. "Weird, right? You could say we're the same pony."

Spike shook out of his daze. "Anyway, where've you been? We have to finish the things on the list!"

"List?"

"The list of things to get done before the fair tomorrow?"

"Oh, *that* list! Um…just a moment, Spot. I need to change."

The dragon raised an eyebrow. "Spot? Change?"

"I'm a princess, right? I need to look amazing for my subjects, right?"

"Uh, sure, but since when do you care about…?"

"Just give me a minute! Wait right here, Spick!"

She shut the door, leaving the dragon confused.

"Spick?"

Dawn rushed to the armoire and pulled out as many dresses as she could carry. She went over to the vanity and pressed them against her body.

"Whoa," she said for what felt like the fiftieth time that day. "If Daphne could see me now!"

Okay, teeny tiny references to different versions of the story. I figured if Twilight can turn ponies into breezies, she could turn one into an alicorn too. Wow, who knew Twilight could be so diabolical? Well, you've seen "Lesson Zero" and "Magical Duel." She can be devious.

The Trick

Forget the excuses! Let's just say: college.

Twilight felt so rebellious. She had never done anything so irresponsible. For a moment she felt guilty for abandoning her royal duties, even if it was only temporary. Still, the adrenaline rushing through her made her feel so alive!

Rainbow Dash must've been rubbing off on her.

As she walked through the palace doors, she greeted the guards with a cheerful "Hello!"

They looked at her strangely at first but then smiled graciously. She found herself snickering again.

Oh my gosh, they didn't recognize me! I even had Spike fooled!

As she trotted through the streets, no pony turned to stare at her, except for a few curious foals who were interested in the crates floating above her. She flinched as a pegasus with a camera flew by but was relieved when he didn't snap any pictures!

"Woo hoo!" she squealed, kicking up her hooves.

A few heads turned at her outburst, but she didn't care. In this disguise, she was just another tourist, a nobody! No one even said hello to her. It felt wonderful!

Then she remembered she had a task to complete and steered toward the fairgrounds. The only ponies around the fireworks tent were Pinkie Pie and a red unicorn stallion whom Twilight figured to be Dawn's father. At the sight of Pinkie, she moved one of the crates in front of her face. She couldn't let any of her friends see her, especially Pinkie! Pinkie was sure to make the connection! She was not the brightest of ponies, but she had a sixth sense about these

sorts of things!

"There you are, Princess!" the stallion called.

Twilight froze. "What?"

A red aura engulfed the crates and floated them into the tent.

"I hope it wasn't too much trouble," Fire Cracker said. "You were gone a while."

The disguised princess blinked as she tried to come up with an excuse. "Uh...yeah, I...I got lost. Um...did you call me Princess?"

The stallion scoffed. "I know you sometimes find it embarrassing, Dawnie, but I can't help it." He ruffled her mane. "You're my little princess."

Twilight sighed in relief. "Oh, right."

She suppressed another giggle. *He actually thinks I'm Dawn! This is going great!*

"Hey, Dawn!"

The voice made Twilight frown. *Oh, no! Pinkie!*

"Listen, I'm gonna have to cancel on giving you guys that tour," the pink pony piped. "I'm gonna be tied up here all day! Princess Cadence said she had a special surprise for us after we..."

She paused and stared at Twilight. The disguised princess tried to hide her face with her wings but remembered she didn't have them anymore. It was too late to do anything when Pinkie pressed her nose against hers and squinted at her suspiciously.

"Uh, Pinkie?" Fire Cracker said, raising an eyebrow. "What are you doing? Why are you looking at Dawn like that?"

Pinkie shook her head, moving Twilight's along with it. "I don't know..." She then smiled and pulled away. "Well, gotta go! Gotta help Cheese with the bumper cars! La-la-la-la-la..."

"Phew!" Twilight heaved as her clueless friend bounced away.

She really didn't understand how Pinkie Pie didn't recognize her, but was grateful anyway.

"Well, we don't have to work until tomorrow," said Fire Cracker. "What say we explore the empire?"

Twilight cringed at the thought of walking around with a stranger, but then remembered that he thought she was his daughter. She looked up at him and saw the warm, fatherly smile he wore. She couldn't help but smile back.

"Sounds like fun."

As she followed the stallion into the streets, she realized that in all the times she had been to the Crystal Empire, she had never really taken time to enjoy the sites. Her first visit had involved battling a thousand-year-old shadow king, and the others had been for business. She had never really noticed how magnificent even the smallest of buildings were as their crystal walls sparkled in the sun.

Twilight paused at one of the buildings. "They have a museum here?"

She was about to walk up the steps when Fire Cracker put a hoof on her shoulder.

"Sorry, Princess. I don't have a lot of pocket money and we'd have to pay admission. It's best we save our bits for food."

Twilight frowned but nodded in understanding. Dawn had mentioned she and her father had financial difficulties. She probably should've grabbed her saddlebag with all her bits in it before she'd left. She made a mental note to visit the museum when this charade was over.

"Hey, there's a comic store," Fire Cracker pointed out. "We won't buy anything, but wanna browse?"

"Aw, no thanks," Twilight said.

The stallion raised his eyebrow in confusion. "But I thought you loved comics."

The princess stiffened. "Oh, yeah! I mean I do, but…I feel like it would be too tempting to look at all those comics and not buy them." Her ears perked up as a new thought occurred to her. "How about we go to the library instead?"

"Um, how is that different from…?"

"Come on, it's this way!"

"Now how did you know that?"

"Um…" Twilight stammered. "Pinkie told me! Yeah! You know how she tends to ramble on about random things!"

The stallion tilted his head, still confused. Twilight bit her lip as she thought of a way to convince him. Then she remembered how she had gotten her own father to take her to the library when she was a filly. She put on a big grin and batted her eyes innocently.

"Please, can we go?" she chimed. "Please, Mr. Crack…I mean… Dad?"

Fire Cracker chuckled. "Okay, if it'll make you happy, Princess."

She bounced up and down in excitement. "Yay!"

First she had felt as rebellious as Rainbow Dash, now she was as giddy as Pinkie Pie. All in all, she felt good! She felt even better when she and Fire Cracker stepped into the glorious library. No matter how many times she would see it, Twilight would forever gawk at the mountains of knowledge sitting on the glistening crystal shelves.

"Can I help you, Miss?" the old crystal librarian asked.

"No, thanks!" Twilight squealed. "I'm good!"

She whinnied as she rushed down the stairs and instantly levitated books off the shelves. The librarian raised an eyebrow at Fire

Cracker, who shrugged.

"She likes to read."

Once she found an interesting title, she trotted to a cozy alcove and sunk comfortably into a blue beanbag chair. She opened the book and started reading.

She sighed in the sense of bliss she was in. Here she was, in a library full of books. She didn't have an important topic to look up involving an impending apocalypse. She could just sit here and take time to let the words fly off the pages and take her to a world far beyond Equestria and her royal duties.

And no one would interrupt her.

"This is the best day of my life," she whispered to herself.

Spike tapped his foot in impatience. Every five seconds, he would glance at the nonexistent watch on his wrist. He was used to waiting for Rarity to get dressed, but *Twilight* ?! She was always on top of things. Even when it was for an important event, she would never take longer to get dressed than scheduled. Why was she even getting dressed now?

The dragon decided he couldn't take it anymore and knocked angrily on the door.

"Twilight, hurry up!" he bellowed. "You've been in there for half an hour! We're way behind schedule!"

"One moment, Spick!"

"SPIKE!"

"Oh, right! Sorry!"

He rolled his eyes and crossed his arms. He heard a cry and a thump before the door was finally opened. He gasped in horror at the sight.

"What do you think?"

Spike had to rub his eyes to make sure it was Twilight he was looking at. The alicorn was dressed in a frilly, poofy pink dress, with one sleeve falling loosely down her foreleg. Her mouth was smothered in lipstick and her hair was done up in a messy bun. She lifted her hoof to prevent her crown from sliding off her head.

"Well?" she asked again.

The dragon shook his head. "Okay, schedule or no schedule, I am *not* letting you go out in public like *that* !"

He pushed the alicorn back inside.

"Hey, what are you…?" Dawn started to protest.

"Take that dress off," Spike commanded.

"But it's so pretty…"

"Take it off!"

Dawn jumped at the dragon's angry tone and hastily threw the gown over her head, knocking the crown off in the process. Spike picked up the gown and dragged it over to the armoire.

"You wanna wear a nice dress today?" he said, hanging the monstrosity up. "I'll give you a nice dress."

He rummaged through the gowns and withdrew a simple, dark blue one with a loose skirt and slightly puffed shoulders. He handed it to Dawn, who shrugged and started putting it on.

Then Spike pushed her again and set her on the vanity. He grabbed a cloth and wiped Dawn's face. Then he picked up a tube of mascara and set to work on her eyes.

Dawn didn't complain until he got to her mane. He released it from its bun and she screeched as he smoothed it out with a comb.

Once the mane was untangled, Spike picked up the crown and

placed it on Dawn's head. He took a step back to admire his work.

"Mmm hmm," he muttered. "Much better."

Dawn rolled her eyes. "Oh please, I was fine bef—"

She paused as she got a glimpse of herself in the mirror. "Oh."

She had to admit she looked better in simple attire, and Twilight's mane style really complimented her face. The light mascara on her lashes was all that was needed to bring out her eyes. She looked down at the dragon.

"You're good."

Spike beamed. "Was there ever any doubt?" Then his face turned serious as he brought out his scroll. "Now can we *please* get back on schedule?"

Dawn gazed up in awe as Pinkie Pie and Cheese Sandwich finished rising their collapsible roller coaster. Dawn had never been on a roller coaster before, let alone seen one. She couldn't wait to ride on it during the festival.

"That looks like fun!" Spike exclaimed.

"Yeah…" Dawn said in awe.

"So, Twilight?"

"Huh? Oh. I, uh, guess we can check rides off the list."

The dragon raised his eyebrow. "Aren't you gonna check for safety hazards like you always do?"

Dawn blinked. "Oh. Of course, uh… Hey, Pinkie! Is it safe?!"

"Safe as it'll ever be!" Pinkie Pie shouted from the top.

The disguised unicorn shrugged. "Good enough for me."

Spike tilted his head in confusion, but checked the roller coaster off the list anyway. He figured Twilight was just in a hurry to get things done.

"Now all that's left is to make sure the food vendors are in place," he declared.

"Mmm, yum!" Dawn said, licking her lips. "Now you're speaking my language!"

They were about to depart when Pinkie popped up in their path. Dawn looked back up at the coaster and then at her.

"How did you…?"

She was interrupted as Pinkie pressed her nose against hers. Panic welled up in Dawn's chest. Pinkie had said she had looked familiar while she was still herself. Would she figure it out?

"Pinkie, though I'm afraid to ask, what are you doing?" Spike inquired.

"Something's different," Pinkie said, narrowing her eyes.

"Well, Twilight did wanna try a new look today."

"No, that's not it." Pinkie pulled away and tapped her chin. "Something fishy's going on, though I don't smell any fish…"

Dawn took advantage of her confusion and walked past her. "Have a nice day, Pinkie!"

"Did she change her mane? Did she get contacts?"

Phew , Dawn thought. *Talk about too close for comfort.*

Pinkie was so deep in thought that she did not see Discord walk by her. He didn't notice her either, for his eyes were glued to the screen of a small handheld device. He was moving in a squiggly line as he attempted to follow the beeping red dot on his radar. For some reason, it kept changing positions. One second it was just in front of him, the next it was on the other side of Empire. He groaned in

annoyance.

"What's wrong with this thing?!" he snarled, shaking the device. He took a deep breath. "No matter. There's something chaotic going on in this Empire and I'm going to find out what!"

Dawn was getting bored. The next half hour was spent examining food stalls. Some of them weren't set up yet, so they had to wait for the vendors to come and do so. When was she going to move on from the dull stuff and get to the fun stuff?

"Tell me that was the last one," Dawn grumbled to Spike.

"Yup!" the dragon piped, checking the last box on the scroll.

She sighed in relief. "Oh, good!"

"But we gotta head back to the palace. Princess Cadence said she had a surprise planned for us."

Dawn grinned. "Surprises are good. Let's go!"

She started galloping towards the castle but then stopped when a thought occurred to her. She looked back at the wings that were poking out of her dress. She smiled brightly at the idea of flying to the palace. She crouched down and spread out her wings.

"How hard could it be?"

She flapped her wings as hard as she could. She grinned as she slowly got higher and higher. It was a little tiring, since she was a lot heavier than she thought. *I really need to lose weight.*

She looked down to see how high she was. The sight gave her vertigo.

"Whoa, that's really high!"

Startled, she unknowingly closed her wings. She screamed as she plummeted to the ground.

Down below, Spike looked around frantically for his friend.

"Twilight?"

He heard a scream and looked up.

"Uh oh."

He didn't have time to move. Dawn collapsed on top of him.

"Wow," she heaved. "Flying's harder than I thought."

Spike groaned as he wriggled out from under the disguised unicorn. "How about we just walk to the palace?"

When they entered the throne room, Dawn mentally named every face. She knew Pinkie and Cheese, and that the four mares talking with them were Twilight's other best friends. The white unicorn was Rarity, the yellow pegasus was Fluttershy, the orange earth pony in the cowgirl hat was Applejack and the pegasus with the multi-colored mane was Rainbow Dash. It helped that these ponies were famous.

She blushed at the sight of Prince Shining Armor. It was the first time she had ever seen a prince, and he was quite handsome. Then she saw Princess Cadence nuzzling him and remembered he was married. Not to mention he was Twilight's brother.

"Oh, Twilight!" Rarity marveled when she saw Dawn in her outfit. "You look absolutely stunning! What's the occasion?"

Dawn glanced over her shoulder and then realized the unicorn was talking to her.

"Oh. Uh, no occasion. I just felt like dressing up today. You know how it goes."

Rarity nodded and ran her hoof through her mane. "I certainly do!"

Princess Cadence stepped forth. "I called you all here to tell you that

you've all done a splendid job preparing for the Crystal Fair! And as a reward for your hard work, I'm treating you all to the spa this afternoon!"

The mares cheered and Dawn clapped her hooves together.

"Oh, yeah! Now we're talking!"

"You're welcome too, Cheese Sandwich," Cadence said to the stallion. "You've worked on this as much as the girls."

"Hmm," Cheese said, tapping his chin. "I could use a massage."

"Oh, one more thing. I don't know if Twilight's told you, but Prince Blueblood will be arriving in a few hours for the fair."

That killed the mood for every pony except Dawn.

"Oh my gosh!" she squealed. "The Prince is coming *here* ?! This is so exciting!"

Every pony looked at her like she was crazy.

"Um…Twilight?" Rarity uttered. "You do realize this is Prince *Blueblood* we are talking about, right?"

"Uh huh!" Dawn exclaimed, nodding her head excitedly.

"But…" Cadence said. "Earlier today, you said…"

She was interrupted as Discord suddenly popped in the middle of the room, wearing a large sombrero and shouting, "Buenos Dias, my little ponies!"

Dawn screeched at the sight of the draconequus and leapt up so high that she found herself dangling from the chandelier. Discord lifted the brim of his sombrero as he looked up at the lavender alicorn and raised an eyebrow.

"Well, I didn't mean to be *that* surprising."

Dawn gripped the chandelier as she stared in horror at the creature.

What *was* that thing? Every pony was watching her in confusion. Why were they so calm when there was a giant monster standing in the middle of the throne room?

"Discord!" Fluttershy exclaimed, throwing her hooves around the creature.

"Hey!" Discord cried, welcoming her hug. "My favorite pony!"

"What brings you here?"

"I'm here for the fair, of course!"

Discord … The name was familiar to Dawn. She looked at the creature again and realized she had seen him before. He had come to Hoofington a short time ago with the monster Tirek. She shivered at the memory of the draconequus rounding her and other ponies up with a lasso and Tirek drowning the magic from her.

She had heard about the Lord of Chaos turning good and then betraying Equestria and turning good again. Good or not, she did not have fond memories of Discord. Even before the Tirek fiasco, she remembered the day her house had been turned into gingerbread. While it had been cool at first, it had fallen apart too quickly and her dad was nearly hit over the head with a graham cracker roof.

Discord returned his gaze to her.

"Geez, Twilight, you can come down now!"

Dawn glanced down at the floor and had that vertigo feeling again. She gripped tighter on the chandelier.

"Um…" she stammered, "help?"

Rainbow Dash rolled her eyes and flew up. "Flap your wings slowly."

Dawn flapped her wings but didn't release her hold on the chandelier. Rainbow grabbed her hoof.

"It's okay. I got you."

The disguised unicorn gulped and slowly removed the rest of her hooves. She stumbled as she attempted to fly right-side-up, but Rainbow steadied her. With her help, Dawn was able to get safely to the ground.

"Thanks," she whispered to the pegasus.

"No problem," Rainbow said. "Just keep practicing like I told ya."

"Well," Cadence said, attempting to break the awkwardness. "It's good to see you, Discord. We're out of rooms in the palace, but I'm sure we can find…"

"Oh, don't worry about me, Princess" Discord said, waving his claw. "I have lodging."

"We were about to go to the spa," Fluttershy announced. "Care to join us?"

"Ooh!" He glanced at his talons. "I could use a manicure."

Through his fingers, he saw Twilight staring at him in discomfort. Confused, he bent over to her.

"Are you ill, Princess?"

"No!" she squeaked, backing away. "I'm fine! Let's go to the spa!"

She hastened out the door, determined to get as far away from the draconequus as possible. She passed by Flash Sentry, who smiled at her.

"Hey," he whispered.

Dawn paused and looked at the guard confusingly. "Hi, uh… soldier?"

Flash's grin diminished and his face changed to match Dawn's. He watched as she and the others exited the throne room.

Discord was doing the same. He scratched his head in bewilderment at Twilight's strange behavior. Twilight Sparkle had *never* been

afraid of him. Sure, he had startled her sometimes, but never like *that* . Something about the princess wasn't right.

He brought out his Chaos Tracker and stared at the red dot. It was blinking directly in front of him. He looked at the departing princess and then at the dot again. He shook his head with a grin.

"Oh, Twilight, Twilight, Twilight. What chaos have you stirred up this time?"

Hmm, pretty short. Well, it's going to be a little slow in the next few chapters.

The Prince

EIGHT MONTHS? Wow. You'll have to forgive me. I had so many other fanfic ideas spring up...well, I'm back to this. It's short, but it's something.

Dawn sighed in content as the crystal spa ponies filed her hooves and horn. She had never felt so relaxed.

"I'm never going back," she breathed.

"Oh, I know how you feel, darling," said Rarity, who was getting the same treatment beside her. "I never want to leave the spa either."

"Goodness, your highness!" one of the spa ponies said. "What have you been doing with your hooves? They're all cracked and dry!"

"Oh," Dawn blushed. "I've just been…working hard lately."

"I think we all needed to unwind," Cadence said as she was getting her mane and tail brushed.

Fluttershy and Applejack shrieked as Discord popped out of the crystal mud bath, his body in a tangle. He whirled around, unraveling himself.

"You said it, Princess!" he exclaimed as he sunk into the crystal mud. He placed his paw and claw behind his head and smirked at Dawn. "You know, we could all get our work done much faster if we had more hooves, or claws, or paws."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Applejack asked suspiciously.

"I just mean things would be easier if there were two of each of us. Don't you think, Twilight?"

Dawn's eyes opened and her brow grew sweaty. "Um, uh…"

"No way, José!" Pinkie Pie exclaimed, emerging from the mud bath with a snorkel on. "Last time I duplicated myself, it didn't turn out so well."

Discord shrugged. "Fair enough." He glanced back at Dawn. "Though it would be interesting if one of us had a twin, wouldn't it, Twilight?"

Dawn gulped. "Yeah. Interesting."

Twilight was so absorbed in her book that at first, she didn't hear Fire Cracker.

"Dawn?" he whispered, gently nudging her. "Dawn?"

"Huh?" she said, her head snapping up. "Oh, yeah! That's me! I'm Dawn!"

The old stallion chuckled. "I hate to interrupt your reading, Princess, but we should get going."

"What? But we just got here!"

"It's been three hours."

"Has it?" She glanced up at the clock. "Oh. Can't we stay a little longer?"

"Sorry, Princess, but it's getting late. We have to get up early for the fair tomorrow, and we still need to get dinner."

"That's okay. I'm not hungry."

Fire Cracker raised an eyebrow. "That's a first. Well, you may not be hungry, sweetie, but I am. You don't want your old dad to starve, do you?"

Twilight sighed as she closed her book. "Okay, Mr.…uh, Dad."

"Come on," he said as he helped her up. "I saw a carrot dog cart on

our way in. Turns out most of the food here is made of crystal!"

She grinned. "Yeah. A carrot dog sounds good."

As she followed the stallion out, Twilight realized that her friends would be having dinner themselves right about now. If Prince Blueblood had arrived already, she was glad she wasn't there.

When Princess Cadence and her party returned to the castle, they were met with Flash Sentry.

"Your highness," he said with a bow. "You came just in time. Prince Blueblood has arrived! He's waiting in the throne room!"

"The Prince is here?!" Dawn squealed, fluttering her wings.

She caught sight of every pony's confused looks and quickly calmed down.

"I mean, uh…show us to him, good sir."

As the guard led them to the throne room, Dawn couldn't help but notice him stealing glances at her. She whispered to Rainbow Dash:

"Why does that guard keep looking at me funny?"

The pegasus let out a laugh. "Good one, Twi!"

Dawn scrunched her nose in confusion and turned to the dragon. "Hey, Spike, why is he looking at me like that?"

Spike smirked. "Maybe he likes you."

"Really?"

She looked at the guard and caught his gaze. She frowned a bit.

"He's handsome, I guess," she murmured.

"You *guess* ?" Spike said, raising an eyebrow. "This morning, you were fawning all over him!"

"I was?"

"Yeah, because he reminds you of that Flash in the other world…"

"Other world?"

The dragon stopped and put his claw to her forehead. "You okay, Twilight? Did you hit your head or something?"

"I *knew* something was different about you!" Pinkie Pie chimed. "Did you get amnesia?"

"Err…" Dawn stammered. "Nope! I'm just, uh…stressed! Yeah, stressed about this whole fair thing and now with meeting the Prince…"

"Oh, I know," Rarity huffed. "Seeing that royal pain is sure to make one frazzled!"

"Exactly, I…royal pain?"

"Do you not remember how he treated me at the Grand Galloping Gala? He was the rudest, most *un-* charming prince I've ever met! Well, the *only* prince I've ever met, but still!"

"Aw, he can't be *that* bad."

"You're right. He's *worse* !"

"Now, now, girls," Cadence said. "My cousin may be a bit… impossible, at times, but he's still royalty, so we must show respect."

"I will if *he* does," Rarity mumbled.

When they entered the throne room, Dawn froze in place as she took in the sight of the unicorn stallion before her. He was even handsomer than she had imagined: blond mane, blue eyes, a gleaming white coat. When he met her gaze, he flashed a glinting smile.

"Greetings, cousin," Cadence said with a slight bow. "I trust your trip was pleasant?"

"Oh, yes, yes, quite," Blueblood said, walking past her and over to Dawn. "So, Princess Twilight Sparkle, we meet at last."

"Huh?" Dawn uttered dreamily. "Oh, right!" She quickly bowed. "H-Hello, y-your highness!"

"Please, just 'Prince Blueblood' will suffice."

"Okay," she squeaked, "Prince Blueblood!"

"We were just about to go to the dining hall for dinner," said Cadence, "if you would care to join us."

"Oh, certainly, but only," Blueblood said, taking Dawn's hoof, "if Princess Twilight would sit beside me."

"Err, sure. That is, if Twilight doesn't object to…"

"No objection," Dawn said, her eyes never leaving Blueblood's.

"Excellent," the prince grinned. "Now we can get better acquainted."

The fake princess let out a giggle, which made every pony in the room stare with wide eyes and scrunched faces. Rarity was especially appalled.

"What is she *doing* ?" she whispered.

"I've *never* heard Twilight giggle like *that* !" Pinkie said under her breath.

" *I* have," Spike said, glancing at Flash Sentry, who was just as confused as the rest.

Blueblood slowly released Dawn's hoof and held out his foreleg. She giggled again as she slid her hoof around it. Every pony kept staring at the odd couple the entire way to the dining hall. It wasn't until Dawn saw the long crystal dining table that she tore her gaze from the prince. Before her was an assortment of foods: pies, cakes, grapes, corn, hay cutlets, foods she could not name, all glittering like crystals.

"Sweet Celestia!" she exclaimed, fluttering her wings. "Look at this spread! I've never seen so much food in my life!" She gazed at her reflection in a corncob. "And it's so shiny!"

"Tell me about it!" Pinkie chimed, her reflection appearing beside Dawn's.

"Remember," Prince Blueblood said as he guided Dawn to a seat, "you are sitting by me, Princess."

"Oh, man!" she breathed. "I'm so hungry, I can eat a whole forest!"

She reached for a corncob but then stopped and looked at the princess at the head of the table.

"It's okay, Twilight," Cadence nodded. "Help yourself."

A handsome prince and *an all-you-can-eat buffet?* Dawn thought. *This is the best day ever!*

She grabbed the cob and started munching on it as if she hadn't eaten in days.

"Well," Blueblood coughed. "You certainly have quite an appetite, your highness."

Dawn blushed and became self-conscious at the fact that she was in the presence of royalty. She smiled apologetically as she slowly set down her cob.

"Sorry," she chuckled nervously. "You must think I'm a slob."

"Oh, you're forgiven," Blueblood said as he nibbled on his hors d'oeuvre.

Dawn rubbed her foreleg awkwardly as she tried to change the subject. "So! Prince Blueblood! Why don't you tell me a little bit about yourself?"

There were several groans from the nearby servants, guards and Rarity.

"Well," the prince began, "when I was a foal, I took many classes in…"

While Dawn was dining at the palace, Twilight was sitting with Fire Cracker on a bench, munching on a crystal carrot dog with ketchup and mustard.

"Mmm!" she exclaimed. "I can't remember the last time I've had a carrot dog!"

"What are you talking about?" Fire Cracker said, raising an eyebrow. "You have one at least once a week. It's one of your favorites."

Twilight bit her lip. "What I mean is…with all that's been going on, it feels like forever since we just sat down and ate carrot dogs together."

He smiled. "We have been awfully busy lately, haven't we? With the bills piling up, you working two jobs and this big order we've had to fill, I can't imagine how much stress this has put on you."

He put a hoof on her shoulder. "Thanks for being a brave girl through all this. I'd be a lot worse off if it weren't for you. If we keep this up, we might be able to pull through these hard times. Once that happens, we'll come back here for a real vacation, just you and me."

"Oh," Twilight said, "I'm sure Dawn…I mean, *I* would love that."

The disguised princess could see why Dawn loved her father so much. It had been so long since Twilight had spent time with her own father, and Fire Cracker wasn't that much different. From what she could gather, he and Dawn had been through a lot together, which had formed a strong bond between them. Twilight made a mental note to visit her father after this whole ordeal.

It had also been a while since she had just sat down to a meal with someone who cared. True, she had only known this stallion for a few hours, but for all he knew, they were as close as peas in a pod. It was a pleasant feeling, though she couldn't help but wonder what her friends were doing right now. They were probably eating with the

pony they thought was her, which made her feel a little guilty.

Oh well , she thought. *Tomorrow I'll make it up to them at the Crystal Fair* .

"…and that is how I won thirty thousand bits at the Wonderbolts' Derby, for the fifteenth time. You have to know the right ponies in order to win big at the races. But the real money is in…"

Dawn fiddled with her fork as she spread her food all over her plate. The prince had been drawling on for hours. She had lost her appetite when he started talking about how difficult it was for him to find a drycleaner who could press the wrinkles out of his bowtie. Across the table, Applejack was yawning, Rainbow Dash was snoring and Pinkie Pie had fallen asleep in her food. Discord was making his silverware dance, which only mildly entertained himself and Fluttershy. Rarity had left the table half an hour ago. Cadence and Shining Armor continued eating, pretending to listen. Spike had slid off his chair and Cheese Sandwich was pounding his head on the table.

"…and then my caddy gave me a *green* mallet instead of royal *purple* ! I had to fire him, you see. My next one thought we were playing golf instead of croquet, so I didn't even give him a cent for…"

"Well!" Dawn said as she got up from her chair. "Thank you, so much, Prince Blueblood, for that interesting conversation about… you. Do forgive me, but I'm quite full. I think I'll go out for some air."

"Why don't I escort you out into the garden, Princess?" Blueblood asked, rising from his chair.

"Oh, I really don't think…"

"I insist!"

He took her hoof without letting her protest any further. She groaned as he led her outside.

She would've enjoyed the night view if it hadn't been for Blueblood's

dull, drawling voice.

"And then there was the young Duchess of Maretonia, who had the most crooked teeth! Just watching her eat was painful! And there was Miss Fleurs-de-Lis, who was much too needy. Then there was…"

"SHUT UP!" Dawn exploded.

Blueblood flinched away from her. "Excuse me?"

"Ugh, just shut up! You're boring me to death!"

The prince gasped. "Now see here, Princess!"

"Uh-uh! It's *my* turn to talk! I thought I was going to meet a prince tonight! A charming, chivalrous prince who would sweep me off my hooves! But instead, I get an obnoxious," she poked him in the chest with every insult, "self-centered, pig-headed, rude, spoiled brat!"

"Uh…uh…" Blueblood attempted to say.

"For the last few hours, you've done nothing but talk about you, you, *you* ! And the topics aren't even interesting! I mean *croquet* and *dry-cleaning* ?! And what made you think it was a good idea to talk about your previous marefriends on the first date?! You didn't even dump them for legitimate reasons! The only problem with your past relationships was *you* ! No wonder you're still single! What mare would want to go out with a shallow stick in the mud like you?!"

She turned on her hoof and huffed. "Good evening, *your highness* !"

Blueblood was struck dumb as the mare stomped away.

"Prince Charming, my hoof," Dawn muttered on her way to Twilight's room. "I finally get to meet an unattached prince and he turns out to be a big…"

She paused in the doorway. Spike was on the floor reading a comic. When she read the title, she squealed and zipped over.

"Is that the latest issue of *Power Ponies* ?!"

Spike jumped back. "Uh…yeah?"

"Oh, I haven't read that one yet! Can I borrow it?"

He blinked. "Since when do you like…?"

"Please? Oh, please, oh, please, oh, please?!"

Spike stared at her and then grinned. "How about we read it together?"

"That'd be great!" Dawn said as she sat beside him. "You don't mind reading from the beginning, do you?"

"No. I'm not even that far along. So, who do you want to read?"

"Oh! My favorite is the Masked Matter-Horn!"

He chuckled. "No kidding. But I get to be Humdrum!"

"Really? He's not really a popular character."

He shrugged. "Eh, he's kinda grown on me. You wanna be the narrator or shall I?"

"You go."

"Ahem," Spike coughed before speaking in a dramatic voice. " *The city of Maretropolis!* "

"Okay, Princess," Fire Cracker said when he and Twilight arrived at the hotel room. "Time to hit the hay."

"But it's only nine," Twilight said. "Don't we have work that needs to be done?"

"We've had a long day. It's time for some rest. Remember, we have to get up early tomorrow."

Twilight yawned as she crawled into one of the beds. "I *am* pretty tired."

Fire Cracker smiled as he pulled the blanket over her. "Get some sleep, Princess." He kissed her forehead. "We have a big day tomorrow."

Twilight watched as the old stallion got into his own bed.

"Hey," she called. "You…you're a great dad."

He grinned. "And you're a great daughter."

He used his horn to turn out the lights. "Goodnight, Princess."

"Goodnight," Twilight whispered.

She turned away from him and smiled as she closed her eyes. Today had been a good day. She couldn't believe she hadn't done something like this sooner. With how great things were going so far, she almost didn't feel like ever going back.

" *So once again, Maretropolis was saved, thanks to the Power Ponies!* "

Spike closed the comic and looked at Dawn, who had fallen asleep sitting up. The dragon smiled and nudged her.

"Twilight," he whispered. "Twilight."

"Hmm?" Dawn murmured.

"I guess you're really pooped, huh? Come on, let's get you to bed."

"Sure, whatever."

Spike slid under Dawn's foreleg and grunted at he lifted her up. Fortunately, she was just awake enough to drag her hooves across the room. She collapsed on the bed and Spike pulled the covers over her. He removed her crown and patted her shoulder.

"Goodnight, Twilight."

Dawn yawned. "'Night, Daddy."

Spike raised an eyebrow at this, but shrugged it off, since she was tired. Then he blew out the candle and went into his own bed.

As Dawn drifted off, she smiled on the afternoon's events. Despite her dream prince turning out to be a nightmare, it had been a pretty good day. Being royalty was even better than she had imagined.

She didn't think she could ever go back.

Sheesh. I can't remember the last time I jumped so much between narratives.

The Fair

It's becoming so much harder to write this fanfic. I realized this after attending a BronyCon panel on romance fics. The problem is this: the couples I've set up are becoming so much harder to ship! Doesn't help that since "Rainbow Rocks," I've been shipping SunLight a whole lot more than FlashLight. Well, I'm going to try following through on this, and try to make the relationships believable.

Fire Cracker was about to wake the mare he assumed to be his daughter, but when he reached out to nudge her, she was already rising from bed.

"Oh, wow," Twilight yawned, stretching out her forelegs. "What a dream."

The stallion chuckled. "Well, nice to see you up for once."

Twilight's eyes snapped open at the sound of his voice. She looked over at her bare back, felt her cropped hair and smiled.

So, it wasn't a dream.

"Sleep well, Princess?" Fire Cracker asked.

Twilight nodded. "It's a nice bed."

"Beats the one at home, eh? Let's go down for breakfast. It's complementary, so we can eat all we want. Then we gotta go to the fairgrounds and start work on the sparklers."

"Huh?"

"The sparklers we're making for the foals, remember? We need the extra bits."

"Oh."

Twilight paled at this news. Dawn hadn't mentioned anything about sparklers. How was she to make one?

Maybe it'll be easy , she thought. *I mean…they're just sticks, right?*

"Twilight?" Spike called as he shook the fake princess' shoulder. "Twilight, wake up!"

But Dawn kept snoozing. The dragon scratched his head.

"That's funny. She doesn't usually sleep this late, unless she's really tired. But she went to sleep so early last night!"

He rubbed his chin and tapped his foot as he tried to come up with something. Then he held up his finger as it occurred to him. He left the room and came back a few minutes later with a pair of cymbals he had borrowed from Pinkie.

"Sorry, Twilight, but it's for your own good."

He spread his arms out as wide as he could before crashing the cymbals together just an inch away from Dawn's face.

"Gah!" she screamed as she sat up. "I'm up, Dad, I'm up! Am I late for work again?!"

"Huh?" Spike said.

She looked down at the dragon, then at her wings and then touched her long, straight locks.

"Phew!" she sighed in relief. "It wasn't a dream!"

" *What* wasn't a dream?" Spike asked. "Never mind. Get out of bed, Twi! We're late for breakfast!"

Dawn licked her lips. "You had me at 'breakfast!'"

She hopped out of bed and paused at the mirror.

"Gosh!" she gasped, looking at her bedhead. "I can't go out like

this!"

"But we're late for…" Spike started to say.

"You go ahead. I'll catch up."

The dragon raised an eyebrow as Dawn started running a brush through her mane. After staring at her for a few seconds, his stomach grumbled and he followed Dawn's order.

"Why's she been so caught up in her appearance lately?" he muttered to himself.

"There," Dawn said once she was done. "Wow, I can see why Twilight keeps her hair this way. It doesn't get tangled up as much! Okay. Now for some chow!"

But when she stepped out into the hallway, she frowned and looked in both directions.

"Which way was the dining hall again?"

It took her a few minutes, but after careful deduction, she chose which way to go.

"Eenie, meenie, miney, mo! Guess I go right."

She took one turn after another, using the same method whenever she had to pick a direction. Ten minutes later, she was in yet another hallway of doors, completely lost.

"What is *with* this castle and hallways?!" she demanded aloud.

"Lost, are we?"

She yelped and turned around to see Discord leaning his paw against the wall behind her.

"Oh!" Dawn squeaked, smiling nervously. "It's you! Err, yes! Lost. I mean come on, look at the size of this place! It's like a maze!"

"Yes," Discord smirked. "There are a lot of twists and turns, aren't

there? Well, there's an advantage to getting lost."

"What?"

He chuckled as he placed his claw on the other side of Dawn's head, trapping her against the wall.

"We get some time alone," he whispered.

Dawn's eyes widened and her throat tightened. "I…wha…huh?"

She shivered as he ran his claw under her chin.

"Now we can pick up where we left off the other night."

"'Scuse me?" she squeaked.

"Oh, don't worry about any pony seeing us, darling." He whispered in her ear. "Not if I teleport us to my place."

Dawn was so confused. Twilight had never mentioned anything like this! Even if she wanted to keep it secret, there was no way she would…would she?

Discord then suddenly burst out laughing and straightened up. "Oh, you should see the look on your face! You actually thought…come on! Like Twilight would ever…"

Dawn stiffened. "I, uh…don't know what you're…"

The draconequus huffed. "You can cut the act. I know you're not really Twilight Sparkle."

She blinked. "How did you…?"

"I'm the Master of Chaos. I can smell a deceiver a mile away. Besides, Twilight's *never* been afraid of me, *ever* ." He leaned forward and examined her closely. "So who are you? You can't be a changeling. A changeling would've jumped at any opportunity to seduce someone as powerful as me. You can't be from another dimension. Otherwise, I'd be sensing a rip in the space-time continuum. A clone, maybe? No, Twilight sealed off that mirror

pool."

He tapped his chin as he paced in front of her. "Let's see…" He snapped his fingers. "I've got it! Evil twin!" Then he frowned. "No way. You're too poor an actress to be evil."

"Hey!" Dawn exclaimed.

"Wait," Discord said, taking out his Chaos Tracker.

There were now two red dots. One was the pony in front of him, and the other was on the other side of the Crystal Empire.

" *Two* dots," he murmured, tapping his chin again. " *Two* chaotic anomalies…and I sensed a magical imbalance earlier…"

His eyes widened and he leaned towards Dawn again. He grabbed one of her wings and sniffed it. Dawn slapped his muzzle away.

"Aha!" Discord cried, pointing his claw at her. "A lookalike! That's what you are!"

The imposter looked up at the draconequus in amazement. "How'd you figure *that* out?"

"Those wings smell brand new, and while Twilight hasn't had her wings for long, they're not *that* new! Your coat, however, is perfectly natural, and the only other magic I can sense is on your mane and tail. So you naturally resemble Twilight Sparkle! Now let's see. It's easy to change one's mane and tail, and to paint over a cutie mark, but to get those wings, you'd have to have power like mine or…"

He paused and smiled mischievously. "Oh, this is just priceless! You and Twilight pulled the old switcheroo, didn't you?! A whole *Prince and the Pauper* plot! Or should I say… *Prin* cess *and the Pauper* ?! Oh ho, I always knew that Twilight was clever, but I didn't think she'd ever do something as chaotic as *this* ! Not so goody-goody after all, are you, Twilight?"

"Okay, so you've got me," Dawn sighed. "You're not going to tell…?"

"What? And ruin this glorious example of chaos that I didn't have to

make myself? Oh no. I want to see how far this will go. Your secret is safe with me, Miss…"

"Dawn."

"Right. So, Miss Dawn Sparkle, where is the real Twilight?"

"I don't know. Probably with my dad at our hotel."

"So Twilight's posing as a run-of-the-mill unicorn? Interesting." He laughed as he hovered into the air. "Oh, this is going to be the most entertainment I've had in eons!"

"Wait!" Dawn called as he started to float away. "Could you show me where…?"

He disappeared in a flash.

"…the…dining hall…is."

She was really starting to dislike the draconequus.

It was twenty minutes before she came across a guard who was kind enough to show her the way to the dining hall, assuring her that he had gotten lost in the castle several times his first week. When Dawn entered the room, she was met with glares and confused stares. Pinkie let out an exasperated sigh.

"Finally! Now we can eat!"

"Where have you been?" Rainbow Dash demanded as Pinkie buried her face in a pile of pancakes.

"Got lost," Dawn chuckled awkwardly as she took the empty seat that was thankfully across from Prince Blueblood rather than beside to him. She shrank into her chair as she caught Discord's smirk from the far end of the table.

"With all the times we've been here," Applejack said as she helped herself to some apple fritters, "I would've thought you'd have memorized the place."

"Don't blame her," Cheese Sandwich said as he chewed on a waffle. "I got all turned around on my way to the bathroom last night! What is with this castle and hallways?"

"That's what *I* said!" Dawn cried.

"Well, we're glad you're able to join us, Twilight," Cadence said with a kind smile.

Blueblood silently nodded. Dawn only now noticed that he was staring down at his plate, spreading his eggs around with his fork, which he surprisingly held in his hoof. His lips curled into his mouth, as if he was biting down on them. The sight made Dawn tilt her head in wonder. She had not known the prince for long, but he was acting very differently from last night.

Cadence seemed to notice his odd behavior too, and gently asked, "Is something the matter, Blueblood?"

"Hmm?" the prince said, snapping his head up as if awakening from a trance.

"You seem awfully quiet this morning."

"She makes that sound like it's a bad thing," Rarity murmured to her friends.

Blueblood's eyes flitted to Dawn before he replied, "Oh, I'm fine, cousin, just…not in a talking mood today."

He returned his attention to his plate and continued his egg painting. One would think Blueblood's silence would make it easy for Dawn to ignore him, but she found she couldn't tear her gaze away from him. She couldn't help but try and catch a glimpse of his old self, or a change in his actions, but he remained silent and did not raise his eyes once. However, she could've sworn she felt his gaze on her when she wasn't looking.

She didn't understand it. Yesterday, he could not shut his mouth for one second. Now he was as quiet as Fluttershy, although she was currently engaged in a deep conversation about flying warthogs with Discord.

Twilight's eyes widened at the chemicals Fire Cracker pulled out of his briefcase. The two of them were in the fireworks tent, and the old stallion was setting up a table to make the sparklers. He handed Twilight several jars of different powders and she stared at the labels in disbelief.

Potassium chlorate? Strontium nitrate? Barium nitrate? Dextrin?

She was familiar with all their names. She just didn't know what to *do* with them all!

Her panic increased as Fire Cracker handed her a pair of goggles and placed three metal pots, shards of aluminum and hundreds of thin wooden sticks onto the table.

What was she supposed to do? She never had to make sparklers at school! She never had to do a report on such work! She'd never even done it for fun! It was like she was being given a test she hadn't studied for!

"Okay," Fire Cracker said, "so we have three hundred sticks, so we'll make a hundred regular, a hundred red and a hundred green."

"Huh?" Twilight uttered absent-mindedly.

He chuckled kindly. "The sparklers, honey. The kids like it when they come in different colors. I just hope I brought enough ingredients. Why don't you start measuring out the potassium chlorate while I make the dextrin solution?"

Twilight gulped as he brought out a scale, some weights, and spoons. For a long time, her eyes switched nervously between the jar of white powder and the scale. How much was she supposed to put in? She considered asking, but figured it would give her away, as Dawn must have done this several times before.

Fire Cracker seemed to read her mind, for he asked, "Have you forgotten the weight again?"

She sighed in relief before responding, "Yes."

He told her and Twilight happily, but carefully, scooped up the powder onto one end of the scale, until it balanced with the weights on the other end. She felt proud of herself when she was finished, until she had to do it twice more and then again with the strontium nitrate, but apparently they only needed one measurement of that.

"Why?" Twilight asked without thinking.

"To make the sparklers red, of course," Fire Cracker replied with a raised eyebrow. "You okay today, Princess?"

"Yeah. Just a little nervicited."

"What?"

Darn you, Pinkie. "I mean I'm nervous…and excited! Sorry. Got my words slurred."

Fire Cracker chuckled. "Sounds cute, actually. But don't let all the pressure get to you, Princess. We don't want to accidentally blow up the tent."

Twilight laughed nervously along with him and cringed down at the chemical powders. Pyrotechnics wasn't as easy as Dawn had made it sound.

All the royals were out on the palace balcony, overlooking the crowd of ponies waiting for the fair to open. Cadence stepped up to a megaphone and announced:

"Hear ye, hear ye! Prince Shining Armor, Princess Twilight Sparkle, Prince Blueblood, and I, Princess Cadence, hereby cordially invite you to the annual Crystal Fair!"

The crowd cheered as they proceeded to the fairgrounds. Dawn stared in awe at the spectacle below her, trying to get her mind off the silent prince standing beside her.

"Okay, Twilight," Cadence smiled, "go have fun."

"Really?" Dawn asked excitedly. "Aw, sweet!"

She raced back into the castle but came back a few seconds later. "Um…which is the way out?"

"You can always fly down," Shining Armor suggested. "You have those cool wings now."

Spike said it before Dawn could, "Nope, bad idea. Come on, Twilight. I know the way."

The minute they reached the fair, Spike asked, "So, what do you want to do first?"

"Show me to the chow!" Dawn exclaimed, licking her lips at a crystal corn stall.

"But…we just ate."

"So? You can never have too much food! And there's a corncob over there with my name on it!"

She lifted her hoof excitedly but then stopped and turned to the dragon. "Uh…you wouldn't happen to have any bits, would you?"

Spike smirked. "I was wondering when you were going to ask." He held up a bulging purple pouch on a string. "You left your purse in your room."

"Ooh," Dawn said when she realized he placed the pouch around her neck. "How much do I…?" She opened it up in curiosity and gasped. "WOW! I'm loaded! I could get a hundred corncobs with this much cash!"

"Hush!" the dragon whispered, covering her mouth. "Do you *wanna* get mugged?"

"Right," Dawn smiled. "Can't be too careful. Anyway, you want some corn?"

"Uh, maybe later. Right now," he paused as his eyes glanced over at Rarity, who was running the arts and crafts stall, "I'm gonna go see if Rarity needs help."

Dawn's eyes widened as the dragon's pupils suddenly turned into hearts and he hovered over to the pretty unicorn.

"Gee," Dawn muttered to herself. "Twilight didn't tell me the dragon could defy logic too." She grinned as she turned her attention back to the corn stall. "Well, time for some grub!"

The easiest part about making the sparklers was dipping the sticks into the mixture. Twilight tried to keep count as she dipped them into the green mixture, before moving onto the red.

"Phew!" Fire Cracker said as he wiped his brow. "That's all of them. Luckily, they have plenty of time to dry before tonight. Why don't you go enjoy the fair for a bit, Princess? I'll stay and clean up."

Twilight had never been so relieved to be finished with a chemistry project. While it had been fun learning how to make sparklers, it was hard to enjoy herself while trying not to arouse suspicion that she had no idea what she was doing. She flung off her goggles and raced out of the tent.

"Be back before dark!" Fire Cracker called.

The disguised princess glanced around at all the different stalls and rides, wondering what to do first. She glanced up at the sun and was pleased when she saw she had plenty of time before her meeting with Dawn.

She noticed a dart booth and shrugged. "Why not?"

The mare running the booth grinned brightly as she approached. "Hello there, young filly! Care to try your luck? Only one bit to play!"

Twilight frowned as she realized the problem in her situation. She didn't have any money! She had left her purse back at the castle, and she didn't know where Dawn kept her money. She considered

going back and asking Fire Cracker for some, but it didn't feel right taking that stallion's money, when it was clear he didn't have much.

So she gave the mare an apologetic smile and trotted off. She spotted a merry-go-round and remembered that the rides were for free.

"Well," she said as she approached the carousel, "might as well enjoy this freedom while it lasts."

Within the hour, Dawn had consumed one corncob, two hayburgers, three crystal berry tarts, and was currently finishing her fourth crystal carrot dog. For once in her life, she was nearly full.

Then she spotted a comic book stand and stuffed the rest of her carrot dog down her throat before rushing over to gawk at the paperback beauties.

"Oh, wow!" she uttered as her eyes fell upon a particular comic in a plastic sleeve. " *Power Ponies* Issue Number Twenty-Seven! *The Rise of Shadowmane* ! With the rare holographic cover!"

Her horn lit up as she tried to pick it up, but as her magenta aura encased the comic, so did a light blue one. She looked up to see a pony draped in a dark cloak, their hood concealing their face.

"Hey!" she cried out, tugging the comic towards her. "I saw it first!"

But the stranger put up a fight, and Dawn found herself in a tug-of-war match. Finally, with a strong pull from Dawn, the stranger's concentration was broken and they fell to the ground.

"Ha!" Dawn smirked triumphantly. "I win!"

But as the pony sat up, her smug expression was replaced with one of surprise. The pony's hood had fallen back, and the face was beneath it was the last she expected to see.

"Prince *Blueblood* ?!"

The prince gasped and replaced his hood. "No, no, no! You have me mistaken for some pony else! Who is this *Blueblood* you speak of? Never heard of him!"

Dawn used her magic to throw his hood back. "It *is* you! What are you…?" She gasped and glanced at the comic hovering beside her. " *No* !"

"No!" Blueblood insisted, putting his hood back on. "That's exactly it! No!"

She couldn't help but laugh. "Oh, this is too rich! Who would've guessed that the oh-so posh Prince Blueblood was a comic book…?"

"Silence!" he cried as covered her mouth and pulled her aside. He glanced around nervously. "Do you want the entire empire to hear you?!"

"So it *is* true!" Dawn smirked after pushing his hoof down. "I'm sorry, but I just can't believe it!"

"Don't! Because it *isn't* true!"

"Uh-huh. So you *didn't* just try and grab a *Power Ponies* comic?"

"No! I mean yes! I thought it was a…society magazine! Yes! I didn't see that it was a rare comic!"

"Aha! How'd you know it was rare?"

"I…I…" He sighed. "Fine. You caught me. Just don't tell any pony!"

"Chill, dude. Your secret's safe with me." She sniggered. "Seriously though. I never would've never taken *you* for a comic book geek."

"I am not a geek! I just…like the pictures."

She raised an eyebrow. "Really?"

"As a member of high society, I appreciate good art when I see it."

She giggled some more.

"It's not funny!"

"Sorry," she said, wiping away a tear. "I just can't believe that you, of all ponies, would be into comics."

"If I let you keep that issue, will you leave me alone about it?"

"Sheesh, grumpy much? Well, thanks." She turned to the stall keeper. "How much for this?"

"That's a rare issue," the crystal mare said. "It's worth a hundred bits. However, for you, your highness, it's on the house."

"Seriously? Oh, wow, that's…!"

Dawn trailed off as she looked down at the comic. A feeling of guilt tugged at her chest. She remembered all those times some pony hadn't paid for their fireworks, and how that affected her and her father financially. It also wasn't fair that she was being given this treatment just because she was royalty, which she really wasn't.

"N-no, that's alright," she stammered as she reached into Twilight's pouch. "I can just…"

"What are you doing?" Blueblood said in surprise. "The mare just offered it to you for *free* !"

"But I don't mind paying…"

She paused when she saw how much money was left in the pouch. She had spent most of it on the food, and there certainly wasn't enough for the comic.

"Huh," she uttered sadly. "Looks like I'm a little short. Oh well."

"You can still have it for free, your highness," the stall owner insisted.

"No, no. It wouldn't be right."

Dawn tried to put the book back when Blueblood stopped it with his hoof.

"She said you could take it already!" he whispered. "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth!"

"But she probably paid a lot for this comic," Dawn replied. "Who knows how much money she had to pull to get all of these? It wouldn't be right just taking this expensive comic for free."

"So? She said you could."

"That doesn't mean I *should* ." She lowered her voice. "What if she has a family to feed?"

"She has plenty of comics to sell. A hundred bits is nothing!"

"Maybe to *you* , but to some ponies, a hundred bits is *everything* ."

Blueblood stared at her for a long moment and then slapped his forehead. "Oh, fine! If you won't have it for free, I'll buy it for you!"

Dawn's eyes widened as he handed a large money pouch to the mare. She looked inside to count.

"But…there's more than…"

"Keep the change," Blueblood whispered, "so you don't tell any pony you saw me."

The mare smiled. "Pleasure doing business with you, your highness."

The prince snorted as he walked away. Still amazed at what had just happened, Dawn galloped up to him.

"Hey!" she called. "That was…strangely nice of you."

"Yes, well," he said gruffly, "I believe a princess shouldn't be denied something she so greatly desires."

She glanced down at her new comic book and then back at him.

"So…who's your favorite Power Pony?"

He looked away and muttered, "Radiance."

"Really? I mean I guess she's cool, but don't you think she comes off as a little stuck-up and vain and—oh, I get it."

He said nothing.

"You know, liking comics isn't anything to be ashamed of. Why all the secrecy?"

"I have a reputation to uphold," he replied. "I'm a prince. Princes don't read childish literature."

"Hey! It's not childish! Comics happen to have colorful characters, intricate plotlines and engaging, even if sometimes clichéd, dialogue!"

"Don't they? I mean who expected Shadowmane to be Radiance's long-lost…?"

"I know, right! And the part with the…"

"When she takes off her hood?"

"Yeah! And the whole backstory?"

"And the dark crystals of…?"

He paused and turned away. "Apologies, your highness. My mouth ran away with me again."

Dawn felt a lump in her throat as something occurred to her. "Is that why you've been so weird all day? Because of what I said to you last night? Sorry, I…"

"No, no. You shouldn't apologize. To tell you the truth…no pony's *ever* spoken to me like that before! Well, except for this one mare, but she was really more frightening than informative, not to mention she splattered my royal coat with frosting! It took days to wash that stain out! Oh, there I go again.

"The point is…you were right. I do talk about myself a lot, and after really reflecting on the way I acted last night…I *am* a self-centered, rude, spoiled brat. Yes, even pig-headed."

Dawn stifled a laugh as he said that last sentence.

"I suppose I'm simply used to being treated above all others," he continued. "But because of my royal blood, no pony's ever been so bold as to point out my flaws, and coming from a *princess* …"

He met her eyes for a moment and Dawn could've sworn he was blushing under that hood.

"…it opened my eyes."

"Whoa," she breathed. "That…is the most interesting thing I've ever heard you say."

He smiled. "So I am permitted to speak in your presence again?"

She giggled. "Sure. So long as you don't bore me again."

"Well, what isn't boring to you?"

She held up her comic and smirked. "Who do you think would win in a fight? Matter-Horn, or Mare-velous?"

Twilight stumbled in her step as she got off the roller coaster. She was dizzy, but she was having the time of her life. It'd been so long since she'd been on a carnival ride, and all day, no pony had pulled her aside for an autograph.

She glanced up at the sun and frowned. It was almost three o'clock. She'd been having so much fun, she hadn't realized how much time had passed.

Oh well, she thought. *Time to meet up with Dawn.*

But after taking a few steps, she paused when she realized she and Dawn hadn't agreed on *where* they would meet up!

I'll just have to look for her then.

For the first time since the switch, she actually missed her wings. It would've been easier to find her double from above.

As she was searching around the stalls, she froze in place when she saw Rainbow Dash and Derpy coming towards her. They were suited up and heading towards the jousting ring.

If they recognize me, I'm doomed!

She searched for a place to hide and finally decided on a nearby barrel. She leaped behind it before the pegasi could notice her. Once they were gone, Twilight sighed in relief and emerged from her hiding place. Unfortunately, she bumped into some pony. She looked up and gasped to see that it was none other than Flash Sentry.

WHY am I always bumping into him?!

Flash squinted down at her. "Do I know you?"

"Nope!" she said quickly, turning away and covering her face with her hoof. "No, you've never seen me before in my life, Flash! I mean…"

She ran off in haste, her face flushed. She had to find Dawn soon before some pony recognized her!

What do you think? Is it plausible for Blueblood to secretly like comic books? I had to give him and Dawn something in common, and sure, this was sort of inspired from that Trixie Tang and Timmy Turner scene in *Fairly Oddparents.* Also, have you guys noticed how Prince Blueblood hasn't done any magic in the show? I could only guess the color of his magic aura.

Man oh man, I had to read up on how to make sparklers and still found it confusing, which is why I didn't go into too much detail with that. I know Twilight's supposed to be all about science, but if she didn't have instructions on something, I

imagine she'd be frustrated.

Fireworks

Wow. I got this out sooner than expected. It helped to listen to "If You Love Me For Me" from the Barbie movie and "I See the Light" from *Tangled* .

"I'm telling you!" Dawn insisted as she and Blueblood, who had removed his cloak, sat down on bench. "Matter-Horn could just blast Mistress Mare-velous with her power beams! Ice ray, heat ray…"

"Yes, but," Blueblood counteracted, "Mare-velous has faster reflexes and heightened senses. She could dodge those beams with ease!"

"But Matter-Horn's also real smart. She wouldn't just blast random beams! She'd use her brain to find the right tactic in trapping Mare-velous into a corner so she can blast her properly! Now, if she were going against Fili-Second, however, she would have less of a chance."

"Ah, but what Fili-Second makes up for in speed, she lacks in brain! Now, the Masked Matter-Horn may not be fast enough to freeze her, but Radiance could conjure up a sort of barrier to catch her."

"Like a giant baseball mitt?"

"Exactly!"

"Huh. I guess with Radiance's looks, she can be…quite the *catch* !"

She winced at the bad joke, but Blueblood laughed regardless. She chuckled along with him.

"This is most invigorating!" the prince exclaimed. "I've never talked about this sort of thing with any pony!"

"How did *you* , a prince, get so much into comics anyway?"

He didn't hesitate. "Aunt Celestia got me a *Power Ponies* comic for

my ninth birthday."

"Which issue?"

"Fifteen."

"The one where the Phony Pharaoh breaks into the Tomb of Anubis, accidentally arising him from the dead?! Oh, that's a classic!"

"Isn't it though? You could say it's been a guilty pleasure of mine ever since. However, the colts at Canterlot Prep didn't think comics were…dignifying. So I've kept my hobby a secret." He turned to Dawn. "I must say, I'm surprised *you* share my interest. I heard you were well-read, but I didn't think that included comic books."

"Well-read?"

It took a few seconds for Dawn to remember that she was disguised as Twilight.

"Oh, yeah! That's me! I'm a regular bookworm!" She chuckled awkwardly and glanced down at her new comic. "I used to read these all the time when I was little. I had to sell most of my comics when we were short on money. We were going through such hard times, with our financial problems and Mom being sick and all. Comic books were my escape from the real world and into the comic world, where the heroes always get out of tough situations, no matter how bad they get." She sighed sadly. "In the real world, however, things only got worse when Mom…"

She quickly stopped herself, not because she was heart-stricken over her mother's death, but because Twilight's mother was still alive.

"Sorry, I…I'm probably boring you. Ironic, huh?"

"No, no!" Blueblood insisted. "I like hearing you talk!"

It was strange, but he did. Usually when he was with a mare, he did all the talking. Now that he'd thought about it, this was the first time he had been engaged in such a deep conversation. He had tried so hard to keep an appearance that he would normally talk about things

he figured would interest ponies of high society. They'd always laughed at his snide remarks, even when he himself didn't find them humorous, but then again, they *had* to agree with anything the prince said.

That was why he became so intrigued with this mare, this *princess* , who had outright told him how dull and uppity he was. He had been afraid to speak in her presence afterwards, but now that the ice had been broken between them, talking with her felt natural, as if he had always talked with her this way.

And he found it surprising how interested he was in what *she* had to say. He had come to the Crystal Empire to court her, but he didn't think that he would be *taken* with her, let alone that he would be conversing with her as…an equal.

He'd been treated like a prince, he'd been treated like a foal by his aunts, but never an equal.

Dawn blushed at his compliment, and rubbed her foreleg awkwardly. It was like when she first saw him, only now it was different. It wasn't his handsomeness that was making her all giddy inside, but the fact that they'd been talking for Celestia knows how long and she hadn't been bored for a second.

What's more, he was a prince, and he was talking with her like she was an old friend. She'd never really talked much with stallions before, not even the colts at school, so this was a new experience for her. She had also never met any pony who loved comic books as much as she did.

Her earlier affections for him were slowly returning.

"Pssst!"

"Did you hear something?" Blueblood asked, looking around.

"Hear what?" Dawn asked absent-mindedly.

" *Pssst* !"

"There it is again," said the prince.

"I didn't hear anything."

She really didn't, for she was still staring intently at him.

" *Dawn* !"

Her ear twitched as she heard her name. She looked over her shoulder and spotted Twilight's head poking out from behind the nearest stall, her hoof beckoning her. Dawn looked up at the sky. She couldn't tell time by the sun's position, but she knew that it was some time in the afternoon. How long had she and Blueblood been talking?

She looked back at her doppelganger and mouthed, *Now?!*

Now! Twilight mouthed back.

Dawn sighed and turned back to Blueblood with an awkward smile. "Would you excuse me while I, uh…go to the little mare's room?" She forced a laugh as she backed away slowly. "Nature calls, you know!"

As soon as the prince wasn't looking, Dawn turned the corner of the stall and sat in front of Twilight.

"Did any pony find you out?" the princess demanded.

"No," Dawn said, shaking her head. "Well, except Discord…"

"Discord?! He didn't say anything to any pony, did he?!"

"No, he said this was too entertaining for him to ruin, so I think we're safe. I think Pinkie Pie's on to me though…"

Twilight heaved a relieved sigh. "Well, it's a good thing we're changing back then. I'm not sure how much longer we can keep this up before some pony else figures us out."

"Oh," Dawn said sadly, clutching her new comic to her chest. "Right. I forgot."

"Forgot? How could you forget…?"

She paused to squint at what Dawn was holding. She recognized it as a *Power Ponies* comic. Then she noticed the purple pouch around her neck.

"Is that my purse?" the princess asked appallingly.

"Hehe," Dawn said with an uneasy smile. "Maybe?"

Twilight scowled and levitated the purse over Dawn's head and opened it up to examine it.

"There's at least…twenty bits missing from here!"

"I was hungry!" Dawn protested.

"For *comics* ?!" Twilight exclaimed, glaring at the book in her hooves.

"What, this? *I* didn't pay for this. Blueblood did."

The princess blinked in confusion. "I'm sorry. What?" She stuck a hoof in her ear. "Did you just say Prince *Blueblood* bought that comic for you?"

"Uh…yeah. Is there any other Blueblood?"

Twilight peered around the corner to look at the prince, who was still sitting on the bench, waiting patiently. Then she looked back at Dawn.

" *That* guy? Right there?"

"Yeah," Dawn said, color coming to her cheeks. "I thought he was a little snooty at first, but now he's actually kind of…sweet."

"But…Rarity told me that at the Grand Galloping Gala, he insisted on *her* paying for their treats, and he just bought you a *comic* ?"

"Not just any comic. A rare, limited edition comic! It's worth a hundred bits!" She glanced at Twilight nervously. "Maybe it's a *good* thing it wasn't paid with your money."

"Hold on!" the princess exclaimed, placing her hoof on her brow. "Sorry, I just can't wrap my head around this!" She pointed back at the prince. " *You* and… *him* ?!"

Dawn smiled and crossed her right foreleg over her left. "I don't know about *that* , but…he's actually good company. And he's good at conversation…you know, when he's not trying too hard."

Twilight stared at her blankly. "This is still *Prince Blueblood* we're talking about, right?"

"Yeah, um…" Dawn bit her lip and turned back to the prince. "Say, you don't mind if we…wait a little longer to switch back, do you?"

" *What* ?! Dawn, didn't you hear me?! If we keep this up, some pony other than Discord is bound to discover that we're not who we say we are!"

"I know, but…I was just starting to get to know the guy and…well, he thinks I'm *you* ."

"Exactly! Which is why you should stop this! If he *is* starting to like you, he thinks you're *me* ! In fact, that might be the only reason he's being nice."

"But if I turn back into…well, *me* , he'll never talk to me again! After all," she looked regretfully at the pony disguised as her, "what prince would ever talk to *me* ?"

"Is lying to him worth it then?"

"Look, I know it'll probably never go anywhere, but…I don't want it to end just when we're starting to get to know each other." She looked pleadingly at Twilight. "Can't I just have one day with him? I've never had even the *slightest* hint of romance in my life! Even if it's just for one day, I want to make the most of it! *Please* ?!"

Twilight had never realized the effect her eyes could have on others. When they got all big and glassy like that, she couldn't help but feel pity.

"Well…"

Dawn could see the princess' hesitation and decided it was time to try a different tactic.

"Look at it this way," she said in a low whisper. "If we switch back now, *you're* gonna have to spend the day with him."

Twilight cringed, knowing it would be hard to shake Blueblood off, especially at the risk of upsetting Cadence.

"Fine," she grudgingly agreed.

Dawn gasped and threw her hooves around her. "Oh, thank you, thank you, *thank* you, Twilight! How can I ever make it up to you?"

"You can start by giving me my purse back," the princess grumbled.

"Oh," Dawn blushed, picking the purple pouch off the ground and handing it to her.

Twilight took it with a glare. "But we're switching back when the fair is over!"

"Oh man!" Dawn cried out, slapping her forehead. "The fireworks! I'm supposed to help Dad with them tonight!" She glanced back at Blueblood. "Though it would be fun to just watch them for once…"

The princess sighed. "Okay, okay, *I'll* help. Shooting off fireworks can't be any harder than making sparklers."

"Right," Dawn chuckled awkwardly. "Forgot to tell you about the sparklers."

Twilight raised an eyebrow. "Anything *else* I should know?"

"Hmm…" Dawn tapped her chin. "Oh yeah. Dad might expect you to shoot sparks from your horn. That's…part of my special talent."

"Okay. Shouldn't be too hard." Twilight giggled slightly. "I get 'sparks' all the time."

The other mare tilted her head, unsure what she meant be that.

"Anyway," the princess said, shaking out of her thoughts. "This time, we need to agree on the exact time and place we'll meet. After the fireworks, we'll meet over by…the Crystal Heart! Yes! I'll hide behind one of the pillars in case some pony we know is already there."

"Crystal Heart, after the fireworks," Dawn repeated with a nod. "Got it. Oh! I have one more thing to ask you." She leaned forward and whispered, "You and Discord…you're not…well…"

Twilight's eyes widened in appalment. "What?! *NO* !"

"Phew! Good! I was worried!"

"What made you think that he and I…?"

Dawn cringed. "Let's just say he decided to, uh…have some fun, before telling me what he knew."

Twilight put her hoof to her head. "Typical Discord. Remind me to have a talk with him after all this."

"Hey, at least he's having too much fun to tell any pony."

"Yeah, well let's hope he doesn't have *too* much fun with this."

"So…are we good? 'Cuz Blueblood looks like he's getting fussy."

"Yes, yes." They both stood up. "Remember. After the fireworks, go straight over to the Crystal Heart!"

"Got it!"

The mares smiled at each other, shook hooves and departed in opposite directions. Neither of them saw the horned pink and blue butterfly hovering over them.

"What kept you?" Blueblood asked curiously as Dawn came into view.

"Sorry," she giggled. "You know mares take forever in the bathroom!"

She winced in embarrassment, but Blueblood gave her a kind smile.

"That's alright. I was only concerned that you were making an excuse to…well, get away from me."

"You kidding? I'm having the best time!"

"Oh, good, because I hear there's a jousting demonstration going on right now. Do you care for jousting?"

"Jousting?" Dawn repeated, scrunching her nose. "You mean like they do in those medieval stories?"

"Don't let my interest in comic books fool you. I do take pleasure in *some* sophisticated activities."

She raised an eyebrow. "Watching ponies skewer each other is what you call sophisticated?"

"They wear protective gear, and from what I've heard, the lances aren't tipped. Didn't you organize this event?"

She forced a smile. "Right! Silly me! Okay. Lead the way, your highness."

Blueblood huffed in annoyance. "Enough of this 'your highness' business. I believe we've reached a point where informalities are appropriate. From now on, you may refer to me as 'Blueblood.'"

Her smile slowly became genuine as she felt weak in the knees. "Okay…Blueblood. You can call me Daw—I mean Twilight! Yeah!" She chuckled nervously. "Twilight! That's my name!"

"Very well then," Blueblood said, sticking out his foreleg. "May I escort you to the jousting ring then, Twilight?"

Dawn struggled to keep up her smile as she slid her hoof through and replied, "You may."

She would've been more thrilled about being on his foreleg if he had called her by *her* name.

As they strolled down the street, they passed by Rarity and Spike. The unicorn mare stopped in her tracks, Spike bumping into her and dropping the pile of straw he'd been carrying for the crafting booth. Rarity looked back at the royal couple in disbelief.

"Do you *see* that?!"

"Huh?" Spike asked, rubbing his head.

"Do you see," she grabbed his head and twisted it around, " *that* ?!"

The dragon's jaw dropped when he noticed Dawn and Blueblood. "I see it, but I don't believe it!"

"How *dare* she?!" Rarity spat venomously, ignoring Spike's cries as she dropped him. "I can't believe her! After I told her what kind of stallion he was, and how he treated me!"

"I don't get it," Spike said, standing himself up. "I thought she liked that Flash guy. And even if she didn't, Twilight would never do something like this!"

"She wouldn't, would she?" Rarity said, rubbing her chin in thought.

"She's been acting really weird lately. Forgetting things, fretting over her appearance, *flirting* …"

"It's almost as if…she isn't our Twilight at all."

"Hey!" Spike exclaimed, snapping his fingers. "I just remembered something! Yesterday, when I went to her room, there was a mare there who looked just like…"

The dragon's mouth shut suddenly and his eyes went blank. So did Rarity's.

"What was I saying?" Spike asked unsurely.

"I'm…not sure," Rarity said, scratching her head. "In fact, I don't even remember what we were talking about." She shrugged. "Oh well. Let's get back to…" She gasped when she saw the mess around the dragon. "Spike, what happened?!"

He looked around at the straw in confusion. "I…don't know. I can't remember. Come to think of it, I can't remember the last few minutes."

Not too far away, Discord was hiding in the shadow of a stall, chuckling at the scene.

Now that Twilight had money, she was looking for something to eat. Her stomach was growling from all the hours she'd gone without food. She was paying so much attention to the food stalls that she didn't see Cheese and Pinkie coming her way. She bumped into the latter, who let out an, "Oomph!"

"Oh, sorry, Twilight! I didn't see you…" Pinkie paused as she got a better look. "Oh, sorry, Dawn! I thought you were…"

She squinted at the lavender pony again and gasped. "Oh my gosh! I figured it out!"

"What are you talking about?" Cheese inquired.

Beads of sweat were dripping down Twilight's forehead.

"What's been bothering me since we got here!" Pinkie shouted, standing up excitedly. "Dawn! Twilight! Twilight! Dawn! Dawnlight! Twidawn! Don't you see?! They look exactly a…!"

She stopped suddenly and dropped to her hooves with a blank look on her face. Cheese shared the same expression. Twilight's fear transformed into confusion.

"Uh…Pinkie? Cheese?" she said, waving her hoof in front of their wide eyes.

After a minute, Pinkie blinked and smiled at Twilight. "Oh, hi, Dawn! When'd you get here? Hey! What happened to my balloons?!"

"You had them a second ago," Cheese said, coming out of his trance. "Hey! Weren't we just six inches down that way?"

Twilight took advantage of their confusion and slid past them. She glanced back at the pair in concern.

"That was a close one," she muttered. "But what happened to…?"

"You're welcome."

"Gah!"

She looked up in alarm at the draconequus who had appeared in front of her.

"Relax, Twilight," Discord whispered behind his paw. "I know it's you."

After quickly recovering from the shock, she looked back at Pinkie and Cheese and then narrowed her eyes at the draconequus.

"Discord," she said between her teeth, "what did you do to them?"

"Oh, I just wiped their memories a bit," he said, waving his paw nonchalantly. "Only by a few minutes, nothing that will leave any lasting damage."

"Discord, what did Fluttershy tell you about messing with ponies' minds?!"

He crossed his arms with a pout. "I was buying you some time, FYI! A simple ' *thank you* ' would suffice!"

Twilight groaned begrudgingly. " *Thank you* . Look, Dawn told me you were in on our secret, but that doesn't mean you can just go around wiping ponies' memories so our… *substitution* can continue."

"Oh, but I thought I was being helpful!" Discord cooed, batting his eyes innocently.

"Well, you won't have to ' *help* ' for much longer. Dawn and I are switching back before the day is over. We'd appreciate your 'help' better if you just stayed out of the way."

Discord flashed a toothy grin and held up his paw. "Very well, Twi—I

mean *Dawn* ." He winked. "I'll stay out of your business from now on. You have my word as the Lord of Chaos."

Still unconvinced, Twilight peered around him. He held up his claw to show that his talons weren't crossed.

"See that you do," she said bitterly.

Discord watched her as she trotted off. Then he sniggered mischievously as he looked back at his tail tuft, which had taken the form of two crossed fingers.

"I'm glad that wall-eyed pegasus wasn't hurt," Dawn said as she and Blueblood left the jousting field.

"She had incredible endurance, I'll give her that," the prince said casually. "That rainbow one had impeccable strength and speed!"

"Rainbow Dash. She's one of Twi— *my* friends, remember?"

"Oh. Apologies. It's so hard for me to remember names."

"That *was* pretty cool. It was like watching two superheroes in battle! Only with plastic lances instead of awesome powers!"

"Glad you enjoyed it. Now, what should we do next?"

Dawn gasped at the attraction before her. "A roller coaster! I almost forgot they had one! Oh, I've wanted to ride a roller coaster forever!"

Blueblood glanced up nervously at the high structure. "Err…I'm not sure we…"

"Come on! Don't be a spoilsport!"

She grabbed his hoof before he could protest any further and dragged him to the end of the long, twisting line. The sight of the fast-paced ride made Blueblood sick to his stomach, but seeing how excited his companion was, he could only relent. He didn't want her snapping at him again for being boring.

He straightened up and coughed. "Very well. But if we're going on this… *thing* , we are doing it my way." He tapped on the shoulder of the pony in front of them. "Excuse me."

The crystal stallion turned and gasped. "Prince Blueblood! Princess Twilight!"

At the mention of their names, all heads turned.

"So sorry, your highnesses! Would you like to go in front of me?"

Dawn's jaw dropped as the stallion stepped aside, allowing her and Blueblood to pass.

"Thank you, my good stallion," the prince said with a look of pride on his face.

"You can cut me, too!" said the next pony in line.

"Me too!"

"Go right ahead, your highnesses!"

"It would be an honor!"

Dawn glanced around guiltily as she and her date continued up the line. "Uh…isn't this a little…unfair? Like…abusing power or something?"

Blueblood looked back at her and whispered, "Would you rather wait two hours for a ten-second ride?"

She looked at the amount of ponies still ahead of them and smirked. "Okay, I'll give you this."

When they reached the front of the line, however, Blueblood's pride melted into panic.

"Look!" Dawn pointed. "The front seat's available!"

He yelped as he was dragged yet again by the enthusiastic mare and pulled into the front car with her. He gripped the metal bar tight

as she lowered it onto their laps.

"So, uh…" Blueblood stammered, his face breaking out in sweat. "You say you've…never been on one of these before?"

"Nope!" Dawn exclaimed, jumping slightly as the car lurched forward and slowly went up the first slope. "There was never one around, so I never got the chance! Have you?"

"Once," he gulped, his head feeling dizzy from the altitude. "It… wasn't the most… *pleasant* experience."

She looked at him in concern. "What?"

"There's…there's something I haven't told you."

"What's wrong? You afraid of heights?"

"Not h-h-heights," he said as they reached the very top. "Just…"

He screamed as they began their forty-foot drop. "ROLLER COASTERS!"

"WOO!" Dawn hollered excitedly. "I MEAN…YOU COULD'VE TOLD ME!"

"I DIDN'T WANT TO BE A SPOILSPORT!"

"I WOULD'VE UNDER—WOO HOO!"

She cheered as they made a loop de loop. Blueblood screamed and shut his eyes tight.

"BANANA NUT MUFFINS!" Dawn shouted through the rattle of the coaster.

"W-WHY ARE YOU S-SAYING THAT?!" Blueblood demanded, his voice still shaking with fear.

"'CUZ IT'S REALLY COOL!"

The prince's hoof flew to his mouth as his cheeks puffed at the thought of muffins.

When the car finally skidded to a halt, Dawn was panting from the adrenaline. Blueblood's white coat was turning green.

"Woo!" she heaved. "What a rush! Let's do that again!"

"Let's not," the prince grumbled as he tried to keep his lunch down. "I think I'm going to be ill."

When Blueblood finally came out of the bathroom, Dawn handed him a bottle of gold liquid.

"Apple juice always helps me when I have an upset stomach," she explained. "Apparently, Applejack always has some handy."

"Apple juice?" Blueblood said, looking at the bottle in disgust. "Has it been…imported?"

She raised an eyebrow. "Uh…from Ponyville, I think."

He gagged and waved his hoof. "I do not consume any food and liquid so… *common* ."

Dawn's eyes narrowed. "Really?"

Her scowl was so penetrating, so belittling that Blueblood became petrified with fear. Eventually, he levitated the bottle and put it to his lips. His eyes widened and he swallowed its contents in a matter of seconds.

"That was…delicious!" he said in surprise.

"It's just apple juice," Dawn giggled.

They proceeded to walk through the fairgrounds, trying to figure out what to do next. Dawn was hesitant about dragging the prince onto another ride. Then she saw something that made her gasp. Hanging in the corner of one of the game booths was a large, fluffy, koala plushie.

"Ooh!" she squealed, running up to the booth. "Look at that koala! I

love koalas!"

Blueblood looked up at the large stuffed animal and then at Dawn's awestruck expression. He smiled at the gamekeeper.

"Tell me, good stallion," he said in the most polite tone he could muster, "what do I have to do to win this animal?"

"Well," the stallion said, "to win that little beauty, you have to knock down all six bottles!" He pointed to the pyramid stack of milk bottles. "Only one bit for three throws!"

"Very well."

He placed a bit on the table and the stallion exchanged it for three white balls. Blueblood levitated one, only for the stallion to wag his hoof.

"Uh-uh, your highness! No magic! Sorry, but it's only fair to those non-magic users."

The prince's smile wavered, but after a glance at Dawn, he stuck his chest out in confidence.

"Of course!" he said, placing the ball in his hoof. "Watch this," he whispered to Dawn.

He tossed the ball straight forward, but it dropped a few inches away. Blueblood bit his lip in embarrassment as his companion giggled.

"Not to worry, your highness!" the gamekeeper said encouragingly. "You still have two more tries!"

He threw the next ball harder. Not only did it end up too far to the left, but hadn't gone much further than the first. The third one was thrown with so much force that it hit the wall above the bottles and bounced back. Dawn pulled Blueblood to the ground before it could hit him.

"Oh," the gamekeeper tsked. "Tough luck, your highness."

"I'll try again!" Blueblood insisted, bringing out another bit.

"Step aside, big boy," Dawn said, slapping a coin onto the counter. "I'll give it a go!"

The prince looked at her in confusion, not believing a mare could do what he couldn't. When Dawn picked up the first ball, she stuck her tongue out of the corner of her mouth and closed one eye in concentration. Then she opened that eye and took a few steps back before releasing the ball in a mighty pitch. It flew straight like a bullet, hitting the bottle pyramid smackdab in the middle, knocking all six bottles over. Blueblood's jaw dropped in a mix of surprise and awe.

"Excellent job, your highness!" the gamekeeper commended, handing her the koala. "We have a winner!"

"How…how did you do that?" the prince asked in a voice barely above a whisper.

"What?" she said smugly. "You and your dad never played catch?"

"You astound me."

She glanced down as he took her hoof, her cheeks turning pink again.

"Here," he said, levitating the stuffed koala onto his back. "Let me carry this for you."

Dawn could say nothing. She just allowed him to carry her prize as they walked hoof in hoof down the street. When she tried speaking, all that came out was a bubbly laugh.

"What's so amusing?" Blueblood asked.

"Oh, uh…nothing," Dawn stammered, her eyes focused on their hooves. "I'm just…having a really great time."

He smiled. "As am I. I must say, I didn't know what to expect when meeting you, Twilight, but now that I have…I'm glad I did."

She frowned slightly when he said "Twilight," but tried to keep her smile up.

When she saw it was getting dark, Twilight returned to the fireworks tent. Fire Cracker had already set up a stall in front of it and was selling the sparklers. It was mostly for the foals, but even a few adults wanted some.

"Did you have fun, Princess?" Fire Cracker asked when he saw his fake daughter.

"Lots," Twilight sighed. "It's been so long since I had this much freedom."

"Well, while you're here, Pinkie informed me on what's going to happen. After the crystal ponies power the Crystal Heart, the sky's going to light up in bright colors. When that starts to die down, we begin our display." He leaned over to her. "Apparently, when the heart is powered, our coats temporarily become crystal like the ponies here!"

"You don't say!" Twilight said, trying to sound surprised.

"And I found the perfect clearing for us!"

"Huh?"

"Well, you didn't think we'd be setting the fireworks off here, did you? We might set the whole fair on fire!"

"Oh, right, right."

As Fire Cracker handed a sparkler to a crystal filly, he winced and put his hoof to his head. This action made Twilight frown.

"Are you okay?"

"Yup," he breathed. "All this extra work hasn't made my migraines any better."

"Have you…seen a doctor about that?"

"It's nothing. Besides, can't waste so much money on a doctor's visit for a silly headache. It'll go away eventually."

As the evening continued, Twilight kept glancing at the stallion in concern. Every now and then, he would wince in pain or drop whatever he was levitating to cradle his head. She knew that a unicorn experiencing migraines was never a good sign, and wondered if Dawn knew this too.

Despite Blueblood's insistence, Dawn wanted to watch the powering of the Crystal Heart on the ground, so she could see the beautiful heart-shaped gem do its work. It was incredible to see all the crystal ponies, their coats glittering brighter than ever, bow to the Crystal Heart. As their muzzles touched the crystal walk, it began to glow and its light spread all throughout the empire. Dawn's mouth gaped in awe as the Crystal Heart spun faster and faster, until it released a pulse of bright light. As it whooshed through her, her coat was instantly crystalized and her mane was put up in a pretty bun.

The castle then lit up and a rainbow beam shot out of the tower. The sky was now lit with beautiful rainbow ribbons.

"Wow," Dawn whispered.

"Come."

She turned to Blueblood as he took her hoof. His shiny crystal makeover made her knees so shaky, she was sure she was going to collapse.

"We can get a better view from the balcony," he said. "I hear there are going to be fireworks afterwards."

On the edge of the empire, Fire Cracker and Twilight, who had also been crystalized, had just finished setting up their fireworks, ready to light them at any moment.

Dawn looked out at the empire from the view above. With the

rainbow lights reflecting off the crystal houses and streets, the empire looked brighter than ever. Dawn sighed as she looked back up at the colors dancing across the sky. Blueblood, meanwhile, was focused on how those colors highlighted his companion's face perfectly.

"This is the best night of my life," she breathed.

She was startled as the prince took her hoof again. He was smiling, his baby blue eyes looking deep into hers.

"Mine too," he admitted honestly. "I can't remember the last time I've had this much… *fun* ."

"Really?" Dawn asked in a soft voice, as if she had forgotten how to breathe.

"Yes. I've tried to appear so…royal and proper for so long that I never really…knew what it was like to…let myself go. I have you to thank for that."

She grinned from ear to ear, a sight which made Blueblood's heart skip a beat. As the lights in the sky were diminishing, so were their crystal coats. However, neither of them seemed to notice, even though they'd been staring at each other quietly for a while, refusing to blink.

Their attention was turned away at the loud popping noise of the fireworks. Dawn felt even more at peace as she watched the colorful exploding sky flowers. She glanced at Blueblood.

"Watch this."

Her horn crackled and a magic beam whizzed up into the sky. Blueblood grinned as a firework exploded in the shape of a heart. He turned to Dawn, who was blushing at what she had just done.

"Impressive," he commended.

"You must think I'm silly that I…"

"Not at all," he said as he took both her hooves.

Meanwhile, Fire Cracker was squinting curiously up at the sky.

"I wonder where that heart came from."

Twilight shrugged as she lit the next firework. "Maybe some pony's trying to impress some pony special."

"Wouldn't be surprising. I did that once for your mother."

On a hill, miles away, another couple was watching the beautiful display in the sky. Discord had spread out a picnic blanket for himself and Fluttershy, so they could enjoy the fireworks away from all the noise, because Fluttershy wasn't fond of crowds and Discord wanted some time alone with his friend. As a bonus, he had a good view of the *other* show.

Fluttershy blushed as a heart appeared in the sky. "Um…Discord… you wouldn't happen to have…?"

But when she turned to the draconequus, she saw that he was distracted. He was holding up a pair of binoculars, which were actually his own eyeballs grown longer, watching Dawn and Blueblood in their romantic stare.

"Discord!"

He jumped and pushed his eyeballs back to their normal size. "Yes, my dear?"

Fluttershy crossed her forelegs. "What have I told you about spying on ponies?"

"Oh, come on, Flutters! This is the most entertaining story I've ever been involved in! Mistaken identity, romantic intrigue, forbidden pleasures!" He stuck out his eyeballs again to look back at the couple. "Oh, will she ever tell him the truth? Will he accept her for who she is? The waiting is *agony* !"

Fluttershy tilted her head, her face scrunched in confusion. "What are you talking about?"

He pushed his eyes back in and smiled down at the pegasus. "Tut,

tut, dearest." He patted her on the head. "We don't want to spoil the story now, do we?"

She stared at him for a moment and then turned her attention back to the sky. Discord smirked at the balcony where Dawn and Blueblood stood.

"Of course, we'll *never* find out if it all ends so soon."

As the fireworks display reached its end, Blueblood, to Dawn's surprise, started leaning forward. Not thinking about what she was doing, her eyes slid closed and she leaned towards him too.

"Oh, Blueblood," she whispered.

He too closed his eyes and sighed, "Oh, Twilight…"

Dawn's eyes opened at the name that wasn't hers. Snapping back to reality, she pulled her hooves out of his. Blueblood opened his eyes in confusion.

"What's the matter?" he asked in concern.

She couldn't get her words out. "I…I…"

She trailed off when she realized the sky had become silent. The show was over. She had to go meet Twilight!

"I…I'm sorry, Blueblood, I can't!"

Dawn tried to run, only for the prince to grab her hoof.

"But I don't understand," he said, looking genuinely confused and hurt. "Did I do something to upset you? Was I being too forward?"

"No! No, no. This…this has all been wonderful. *You're* wonderful!" She sighed. "Sweet Celestia, you're so wonderful." She shook her head. "But I can't! I…I think we should just be friends. Yeah! In fact, it's best that you never speak to me again, especially not about today!"

"Twilight, I don't…"

"I'm sorry! I have to go!"

She yanked her hoof out of his hold and rushed inside. He called out after her.

"Twilight! Wait! Please explain to me!"

"I can't! I can't…I can't…I can't…"

Her voice became quieter as her eyelids suddenly grew heavier. Eventually, she slowed down and started to wobble.

"Twilight!" Blueblood cried out as her hooves gave out beneath her.

He was there in time to catch her.

"Twilight!" Fluttershy shouted as she and Discord came up the hallway. "What happened?!"

"I…I don't know," Blueblood said, his lip quivering. "She just… fainted."

"Oh, she's probably just pooped!" Discord said, waving his paw nonchalantly. "You know, from all the excitement!" He snapped his fingers and Dawn's body levitated. "Let's take her to bed, shall we?"

Fluttershy smiled. "That is so sweet of you, Discord!"

He frowned. "Don't sound so surprised!"

"Oh, I hope she's alright. We have to catch the early train to Ponyville tomorrow."

As Discord carried Dawn to Twilight's room, Fluttershy trotting alongside him, he glanced at the imposter's fake cutie mark and had an idea. He grinned mischievously and snapped his tail as he would his fingers, making sure Fluttershy didn't notice. The fake cutie mark lit up for a second, and Discord chuckled slightly.

No way was he letting this charade end when things were just

starting to get interesting.

Twilight paced around the crystal heart. She'd been here for half an hour. The streets were empty and the palace guards were eyeing her suspiciously.

"Where *is* she?!" she hissed under her breath.

"Hey, Miss!" one of the guards called. "No loitering around the crystal heart!"

Twilight looked up at the guards and trotted over to them. "Please, have you seen Princess Twilight? I need to see her!"

The guards laughed.

"Who *doesn't* want to see the princess?!" said the second soldier.

"But you don't understand! This is an emergency!"

"Yeah, right!" the first one snorted. "Like we haven't heard *that* one before!"

Twilight grunted in annoyance. It seemed the only way she was going to be let in was if she told the truth.

"Look," she said carefully. " *I'm* Princess Twilight, alright? I'm just in disguise!"

Her horn lit up and she changed her mane style back to normal. The guards stared at her and laughed.

"You're going to have to change more than your hair to look like a princess!" the first one said, pointing to her bare back.

Twilight then mentally smacked herself, remembering she could perform the reverse transformation spell without Dawn's presence. She closed her eyes and concentrated to get her horn started up. However, it fizzed out.

"What?"

She glanced at her back, seeing that it was still wingless. Then she spotted the firework on her flank.

"My cutie mark!"

She summoned a washcloth, not seeing the fake cutie mark glow for a split second. She tried to rub the paint off, but nothing happened.

"What?! No. No, no, no!"

The guards were getting tired of this.

"Look, lady," the second one said, "we've got a job to do, and that's to keep unwanted guests like you out of the palace. So stop wasting our time and run along home."

"No!" Twilight insisted. "You don't understand! I'm…"

"Dawn, is that you?" Fire Cracker called as he trotted up to her. "I've been looking everywhere for you! And what have you done to your mane?"

"Is this your daughter?" the first soldier asked, pointing his spear at Twilight.

"She insists she's Princess Twilight," the second one sniggered.

"Oh, I'm sure she was just having a bit of fun," Fire Cracker said, patting the mare's shoulder. "Sorry if she bothered you, officers."

"But I…" Twilight started to say.

"Come along, Dawnie."

Twilight glanced back to the castle as the stallion dragged her away.

"Now, what made you go and do a silly thing like that?" he asked sternly. "Didn't I teach you better than to disrespect authority?"

"I…I was…"

"We've had a long day, honey. Let's just go back to the hotel and get some rest. And change your mane back! You look silly."

Twilight sighed and did as she was told. There was no use resisting. She couldn't get into the palace anyway. She wondered why Dawn hadn't kept their appointment, and also why she couldn't turn herself back or wash away the fake cutie mark. She had no choice but to run to the palace first thing in the morning and wait until Dawn came out so they could switch back.

She hadn't seen Discord hiding behind one of the crystal pillars, snickering at the mayhem he was stirring up.

You're right. Twilight's friends *would* figure something was going on. Well, good thing I brought Discord in then. What, you really thought they were going to switch back so soon with no real conflict?